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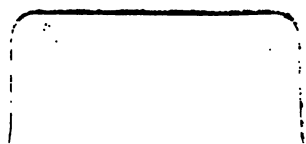
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A LOST LOVE

A LOST LOVE.

BY

ANNE C. OGLE

ASHFORD OWEN

"C'est bien à l'amour qu'il en faut venir à toute époque, en toutes circonstances, en tout pays, tant qu'on veut chercher à comprendre pourquoi l'on vit, sans vouloir le demander à Dieu "

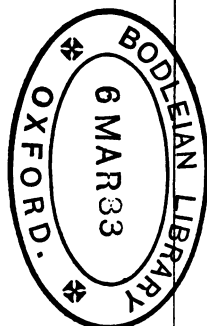
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A L O S T L O V E.

CHAPTER I.

It was a dull autumn-day; the leaves of the sycamores had nearly all fallen, and strewed the short drive (avenue it could hardly be called) which led to Grainthorpe Park. The trees were so diminutive, that to an eye not accustomed to the stunted growths on the northern coasts of England, they would immediately have suggested the idea of Chinese trees, whose branches, in the circumference of a flower-pot, imitate those of the gnarled, knotted forest oaks. Park too! The place had nothing of that excepting the name, for "down in our country" they call fields "parks," and a large one which lay in front of the house was nearly all the "pleasaunce" which belonged to the mansion.

An iron railing separated the field from a few stiff flower-beds fronting the windows. The frost had blackened the dahlias, nothing seemed to prosper except the box-edging, and that was both luxuriant and disorderly. Several firs, which had grown in spite of the east wind, and if not tall, were not very stunted, stood on the grass, and afforded some shelter to the house: a dark brick building, with a front of four heavy square windows.

The sea, some half a mile off, hardly formed a redeeming point in the landscape, seen as it was through the gaps in the low sand-hills, called "links" in that country, thrown up all along the shore, their size and shape often altered, on the side next the sea, by every strong wind; whilst, to the landward, their form received some consistency from the coarse grass, or rather rushes, which grew there.

Flat fields, red-roofed cottages, a coal-pit, and the straight lines of two plantations, were the principal features of the country as seen from the four front windows of Grainthorpe.

A girl was looking from the drawing-room window; sometimes working and sometimes studying the landscape, with an expression of face which might betoken either deep thought or utter vacancy. She rose as she heard the sound of wheels, and then one

saw that she was thin rather than slender, for she was well and strongly built.

Her complexion was fair, and her gray eyes large and handsome. Her mouth, too, was rather large, and the lower part of her face had, especially when in repose, a look of squareness, but was otherwise pretty. She went to the front-door, where she met a short, stout, elderly gentleman, whose thick, fuzzy, gray hair stood on end in the most rebellious way when he took off his hat, and still gave him a rather youthful air. She welcomed her uncle, and asked for news in a general way, although she must have known that in all probability nothing remarkable had happened that day at Eastham, the large manufacturing town, some three miles off, where her uncle went for business every day.

"Women are always insatiable about news. I never knew such creatures," answered Mr. Sandon, with an air of benignant superiority. "No, I saw no one, and heard nothing—met William Ledward twice in the street, that's all—but I have news for all that, Georgy, dear!"

"Well, uncle?"

"Well, miss, I have heard from somebody; you won't have him home yet. I don't know but that it is as well; you are young enough in all conscience:—time enough—time enough."

There was but little disappointment visible in Georgy's face; but her uncle was not observant, and besides had his own opinions as to the nature, habits, and customs of girls, into whose dispositions he believed that he possessed a special insight.

"Here is the letter, and one enclosed for you: and now be off, for I have plenty to do before dinner."

Georgy Sandon slowly betook herself to her own room, and sat down to read her letter, which reminded her that she was one month nearer to matrimony. She was an orphan, and had but a childlike recollection of either father or mother. She had lived at first with her grandmother; and, on the death of her grandmother, had come to Grainthorpe. Five years had passed since, at fifteen, she had become one of her uncle's family. He had taken on himself, even from the time that she was left an orphan, all the material responsibility of a father. He had always cared, in his way, for her and for her interests, and had never suffered his wife to fail in any outward forms of affection towards his niece Georgina. Her father, the elder son of a poor country gentleman, died soon after he succeeded to his property, worse than penniless. His brother, much to the disgust of one or two relations, had, after duly reflecting on the meagreness of the matrimony which fell to his share, his slender interest, and

the small chance of success which awaited him in any of the more aristocratic lines of life, entered into trade. Whether the little money that yet remained to Georgy would ever be recovered for her, seemed doubtful. It was sunk in collieries, from which it seemed inclined never to arise, and had all been muddled away in some inexplicable manner, of which nobody could even desire to attempt the explanation.

Nearly a year ago, she had become engaged to Captain Anstruther, the man whose letter she was about to read. As there was no other vocation for her in view, her uncle and aunt were both on the matrimonial side, which, added to the fact that she had no inclination for any other person, carried the day, with all the other little considerations which generally influence so largely great decisions.

Well, she opened her letter: an affectionate, uninteresting composition, with many desires for a speedy return, and some particulars as to the society of Cape Town, and the customs of the natives. It seemed to tell the tale of the writer's character: an upright, delicate, finikin handwriting; and, in spite of its uprightness, a something wavering and uncertain about it: if he had not taken great pains, it would have sloped and straggled.

Like it was to the man, so painstaking and exact

in small matters, and so undecided and indolent in great things.

He was eager for self-improvement, and always embodied the results of his researches into the manners of the natives, and his observations as to the meteorological phenomena of Africa in contradistinction to those of Europe, in his letters to Georgy. He mentioned also his convictions as to the blessings that sound religious knowledge would be to the African population, and the gratitude which we ought to evince at having it ready at home to our hands (or ears and hearts, rather). Of love he did not treat much, and only had one or two set phrases on the subject, which he altered and transposed, but which were originally the same; these often recurred just before he signed himself "yours most heartily and affectionately."

A few days before he sailed, an accident had brought his intentions concerning Georgy to a crisis. He had known her for nearly a year, but had never yet dared to speak the mind which he had been slowly and surely fixing. He might have gone away and the words have remained unspoken, had not a conversation with Mr. Sandon, who mentioned to him an unlucky speculation which he himself had made, and which involved the loss of part of Georgy's inheritance, brought forward a discussion concerning her prospects. Then the offer which was always

on Captain Anstruther's lips found utterance at last, and Mr. Sandon was really pleased.

"She could not have done better; and if her father were alive he would have been, or, at all events, ought to have been, satisfied. Poor George's views had been so visionary and exacting on some subjects, that one could not say with certainty what he would have liked."

Mr. Sandon had Georgy into his room for a few minutes' talk. Her aunt heartily approved, and was kinder than usual all the evening, not making any remarks on the subject till they went up to bed; then she sat gossiping, seeming to treat her already with more respect and deference, as a person who was really to hold a position, have an opinion to give, and to become that dignified and responsible person, a married woman. Georgy felt, on bidding her aunt good-night, that she had somehow grown both taller and broader, and the flounces of her dress seemed to rustle consequentially along the passage as she went towards her own room.

Stephen proposed in his own proper person the next morning, and Georgy listened silently. It was soon done, without much demonstration or sentiment. She rather liked being liked—everybody does. To be honestly and heartily made love to always carries some weight with it, even though it be all on one side. And Georgy felt a certain degree of responsibility

at being the recipient of such a store of deep feeling. She did not say much herself, and monosyllables were her refuge.

Stephen refused to stay for the Eastham ball, which was in prospect; and Georgy had rather looked forward to his doing so. He could have stayed, if his fidgetty punctilious love of order had not taken him to Portsmouth ten days earlier than a man who wished to strain a point need have gone. So Georgy at least thought, but she found her wish disregarded, and Stephen's energetic declaration, "that all through life she might do what she liked with him," was in point of fact but a figure of speech. She was not in the least hurt: which would have been unreasonable; but the heights of responsibility upon which she dwelt the day before were somewhat lowered.

Stephen set calmly forth on his three years' devotion to his country, well pleased and well contented with his lot. He attached no idea of insecurity to a long engagement. His brother and his two sisters had been betrothed—the one for two years, and the others for more than four, and the respective persons were on both sides of one mind at the end of their probations; and Stephen, who reasoned in all matters from analogy and had never yet embraced an original idea, thought that a three years' engagement fell into the natural course of things. Aunt

Jane would have deemed a too hasty marriage absolutely indecorous; and Mr. Sandon, who had settled all things without much consulting either of them, had no idea of a woman's not waiting three years, or thirty, if her parents or guardians wished it.

CHAPTER II.

GEORGY having read her letter, went hastily down to dinner, which passed over much as usual. Aunt Jane was a good deal occupied by an impartial and unprejudiced examination into the shortcomings of Miss Robson, who taught the children French, music, and all the rudiments of a polite education, and heard Charlie his declensions, though herself ignorant of the Latin tongue. Poor woman! she might no more hope to do right in the eyes of Mrs. Sandon than a Prime Minister or a Chancellor of the Exchequer in those of the remainder of the political world. Uncle Robert never talked when he had nothing to say, and was therefore silent.

Aunt Jane was a thin woman, with a florid complexion. In her youth it had been often compared to lilies and roses; but now, alas! the roses had usurped the principal place. In her girlhood, she had been proclaimed a beauty; and, at a distance, well dressed, still made a show. She would have bullied her husband if she could; but, as it was, she fell back upon the children, servants. Miss

Robson, and Georgy, who, as she grew older, was gradually losing the dread she had once felt for her aunt. Mrs. Sandon was called a kind-hearted woman; that is to say, she was kind when neither her self-love was touched nor her jealousy aroused: easily flattered, and jealous of the affections of others; very spiteful in a sanctimonious, self-righteous manner, if she conceived herself in anywise injured; eager for authority, and always insisting upon giving everybody else advice. She was in reality intensely limited; but possessed a simple, undoubting faith in her own capacity. Perhaps she was right, for she was often called amongst her acquaintance a most agreeable and superior woman.

"There is an invitation for you to stay at Millthorpe Grange, dear Georgy. Mrs. Everett will be there; they are not my style of people: she *is* agreeable, I believe, but it is not the sort of agreeability I like." Mrs. Sandon said this with the manner of so many people when they own to the cleverness of others: they assume an air of reluctant defiance, when it intrudes itself upon them, too evidently to be denied. Their manner seems to express, "Yes—well, So-and-so may be amusing, and I daresay is—I could be amusing too, if I liked, but I don't like."

In one of Balzac's stories, the advice given by a lady to the hero, bids him not be too brilliant, and never amuse the company too palpably: "Que votre

supériorité soit Léonine," says she. And never was better advice to those who, superior to their neighbours, yet wish to escape their censures.

"Well, I give Georgy leave," said Mr. Sandon, dogmatically: "it is good for girls to see a little of the world, but not too much!"

Georgy closed quietly with the permission, and expressed her satisfaction at the prospect of her visit. Going to Millthorpe stood to her in the place of balls, flirting, and all such female diversions; for none of which she had the least taste: that is to say, she firmly believed so. Mrs. Lewis, the mistress of Millthorpe Grange, was one of the few people whom Georgy knew; and the lady always remembered their acquaintanceship, and since Georgy had been grown up, generally asked her at least once a year. So the question of Georgy's visit was settled, and the conversation returned to its usual course.

One other person yet remains to be described, and the family party will be complete. Miss Sparrow, commonly called Aunt Sparrow, Mr. Sandon's aunt, and consequently Georgy's great-aunt. She was old and rich. Mrs. Sandon principally valued her for the use she might be to the children. Mr. Sandon had a good deal of reverence and affection for her, and acknowledged her goodness in a general way. Georgy, who was young and impatient, did not very deeply regard that gentle, seemingly passive amia-

bility. "She was good and kind, but a little tiresome occasionally;"—and so she would have dismissed her. If Aunt Sparrow had known the way in which she was regarded by the three, it would not have altered her for one moment towards them, and she would not perhaps have thought herself entitled to more consideration. She had pleased Georgy by asking her to go back to London with her and pay her a visit; but such a needless, frivolous expense her uncle and aunt would not hear of: besides London was a bad place for girls, and even when given to understand that her going would cost them nothing, Aunt Jane would not hear of it, and had easily persuaded her husband that she was right.

"Well, when I'm married you'll ask me, aunt," whispered Georgy in a defiant undertone,—“when I'm married.”

"Yes, dear, I will; but you know matrimony can't be all visiting and amusement."

"Of course not; I mean to set up a little Grainthorpe of my own, a well-ordered paradise" (mockingly); "but I'll get an outing sometimes," she added, in the true north-country chant.

"Don't be foolish, dear, and reckon upon marriage only as a means of ——"

"No, dear aunt, certainly not:—shall I read to you? I know your eyes are weak to-night."

"No, my dear, I am afraid I shall bore you."

"But I like your volume of sermons very much" (uttering the falsehood most energetically); for she felt remorseful at having sometimes been wearied and left her aunt alone over her knitting. None of the party were more grateful than Georgy when bedtime came, for she was half-asleep whilst still reading aloud. It was not often that she mentioned her engagement in joke; but now she was vexed at the refusal to let her visit her aunt, and lay down, restlessly whispering, "When I'm married, when I'm married!"—She had such a thirst for happiness. It seemed as if her longing could almost wrench from fate the arrears of life and love that were due to her. It was an undefined desire, and she honestly believed that mere freedom would satisfy it. There were friends to be made in the world; there was intellectual life and growth in the world; there was—she could not tell what—but she wished for it the more, because she did not know. She could only tell that it was not Grainthorpe.

The next few days passed away as many more had done. The house was very small; the dining-room and drawing-room occupied the whole front. Aunt Jane did not inhabit the drawing-room of a morning, but pervaded all parts of the house in her house-keeping and maternal capacity. When Georgy was not working, or acting as a sort of vice-housekeeper

(for Aunt Jane meant to do her duty by her, and to teach her all useful things), she sat alone in the drawing-room, reading or playing. This was the only quiet part of the day. In the afternoon she walked with Aunt Jane, and she was no longer alone. It was a very dull, comfortless existence that she led. Mornings were better than afternoons, for they were passed with Aunt Jane. Afternoons were quieter than evenings, for then she sat through many a conjugal dispute, stitching on with a dreary patience, and each day that she grew older feeling more and more out of place.

They did not want her : they could not want her. She had never received tenderness from either of them ; but her uncle had been kind to her in all material things, and she was burdened with a sort of remorseful gratitude towards him : she did not know always how to express the gratitude, and she constantly reproached herself for not loving him better. He was an irritable, imperious man, not enduring that any one of his own family should have an opinion of their own ; and yet Georgy's reserve and passiveness did not always please him : he would have taken contradiction better. She had the habit of being afraid of him, and all her efforts at approach only made her feel distinctly that they were far more familiar than intimate. She had no friends of her own age. Aunt Jane did not wish her to associate

much with the Eastham people, and the county people were not at much trouble in seeking Mrs. Sandon's acquaintance; so, beyond a few gentlemen of Mr. Sandon's age, they saw hardly any one. Georgy's only acquaintances were the Miss Macbeans, who patronized and protected her; but the young ladies did not in reality care much for each other: indeed Georgy's life could better be described in all things negatively than positively.

CHAPTER III.

It was very different at Millthorpe Grange; though only in the next county, you might well have fancied it another country. It was a pleasant house, standing almost amongst the moors, and you came upon it suddenly, lying in a deep narrow valley; not bleak and barren as many of those valleys are, but whose sides were covered with trees. To come suddenly upon the trim, beautiful garden, after leaving the road, which wound for some way amongst the firs and ash-trees, was a pleasant sunny contrast from that wild road with its trees rapidly changing as every autumn day passed on.

There was still sunshine on the hills opposite the house; the gentlemen were not yet come in from shooting, and Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Everett were sitting over the fire, in the midst of a long and intimate conversation. Dress and sentiment, intellectualities and actualities, people one cultivates for pleasure, and those who are necessities; all these were talked over and despatched in that quick, womanly way, where one word must explain the whole: for every

two or three people have a sort of cant language of their own.

Constance Everett was not pretty in the strict acceptation of the word—not pretty, if regular features are all that make the beauty which dwells longest in our recollection; but a thousand pretty women have faded from my memory, while this one, with her faults and her graces, her enthusiasm and her worldliness, her simplicity and her vanity, is still before me, and her laughter is always pleasanter to my remembrance than that of most other women in this world. She was very fair, and enemies would have called her colouring *fâde*; but no one who had ever seen her face change as she told a story, or *felt* her smile when she wished to please (and it was her wish pretty often) could have thought her so. She seemed to fulfil the description of one of Madame Hahn Hahn's heroines, of whom beauties said, "she is very clever, but not a beauty; and the wise literary women, she is very fascinating, but not deep."

Margaret Lewis was a great contrast to her friend and old schoolfellow Constance—tall, but rather awkward: fine-looking, some people might have called her, but few would have said pleasing. She had a good deal of capacity, and of the material for success, yet did not possess the art of making the most of herself. People less good-looking than she was have often been called pretty, and those who far less

deserved it, clever. And yet she valued both these triumphs keenly: or rather *had* valued them; those around her did so, and she had learnt it of them. Singularly devoid of all those small attractions which give success in society, she had been taught to consider society her vocation. Her mother, an extravagant, brilliant woman, who did succeed in the world, brought her out in vain: it appeared that neither success nor husband were in store for her.

Poor Margaret! she was romantic, and her ideas of a husband were rather exacting. Her day came at length; a worthy, prosaic gentleman presented himself, and Margaret contented her mother by accepting him. But she was disappointed, and showed it in her sarcasm, which was not natural, but had grown upon her. She was really kind-hearted, and was never bitter against individuals, but against things and institutions in the abstract. Her general reflections were always sarcastic when she was unconstrained, but sometimes she suppressed her natural disposition, as if she feared the ridicule which attaches to a disappointed person. What is a sarcastic bitter tone after all, but the expression of disappointment? more wearisome sometimes, and gaining smaller indulgence than a downright sentimental complaint, which is less disguised and arrogates less distinction for itself. It was the knowledge of this which repressed Margaret's bitterness; and perhaps time and

children, who so change every woman, would efface it. Neither so ready nor so expansive as Constance, it was the great difference between them which constituted their mutual attraction. Margaret always came out under her friend's influence, and Constance enjoyed Margaret's hearty appreciation of her.

Constance had married for love. Luxuriously brought up by a strict and stupid aunt, she had always looked forward to falling in love as a great entertainment and delectation. She had a "*grande passion*" for her husband, and for a short time they worshipped each other most devoutly, whilst her visions of life seemed better fulfilled than those of most people. But in time there fell some shades upon her pleasant existence. She, her husband, or somebody, was extravagant, and their London house was sold, and he fell ill. It was whispered, too, that he had not behaved to her in all things as he should. She never spoke ill of him, and no blame whatever attached to her. He was in Italy now for his health, and did not care to have her with him; it was better in every way, and more economical, that she should stay. "In the spring he would rejoin her," she said, rather languidly; and perhaps had no great desire that that spring should come quickly.

"And what shall you do then?" asked Margaret.

"Do?—Why we must settle somewhere. Frank

may perhaps get a place somewhere in India, or some outlandish country."

"And shall you go?"

"Yes, I suppose I must; but I shan't stay long," said Constance, with a wilful, merry look:—"I can't be too much away from Frank," she added, more softly; "he does not like it: I don't know why, for he does not care for me. He was pleased once when anybody admired me; but now he sneers when they do, and seems to be jealous."

"You are right, my dear; you must not be too much away from him: it would never do," said Margaret (who was generally practical in her remarks)—"and then you have more power over him than it pleases you to own to in your melancholy moods."

"Power over some people, perhaps; but not over him," she replied, sadly.

"Yes, you have power over some people I know: James Erskine, for one."

And Constance smiled rather consciously.

CHAPTER IV.

THE day came for Georgy's anticipated visit; but Mrs. Everett was gone, and the party only consisted of a matron friend of Mrs. Lewis, one or two sporting gentlemen, and Mr. Erskine, a distant cousin of Georgy's, whom she had never seen. She felt very childish and small as she crept down-stairs, wondering what the people would be like, and wishing that her old ball-dress could by any possibility look like the pretty "demi-toilettes" of the other ladies. It was nearly dark, but there were no candles, only the bright streaming firelight, as she came into the drawing-room before dinner. The two ladies were standing in the window, and a tall man by the fire; he turned round quietly, and courteously claimed Miss Sandon's acquaintance on the score of cousinship. His greeting was so easy and self-possessed, so unlike the usual spasmodic civilities of the Eastham gentlemen, that she seemed to be on a different footing with him from the rest of her acquaintance.

The evening passed on, until the gentlemen were entering the drawing-room after dinner, and the

ladies were busily talking to each other. Georgy was on a sofa, in the corner, as busily working at a large parrot. She had wondered, during dinner, what Mr. Erskine was saying across the table; and now she wondered whether he would speak to her. He stood turning over a newspaper at the table, and looked up as if he was uncertain where he should place himself. A more fastidious woman than she was might have watched him, and felt pleased that he should talk to her: so Georgy thought, at least, and always did think. He put down the paper, came towards the sofa, and sat there all the evening.

He talked as other clever people talk every night—that brilliant generalizing talk, which is so easily attained, and may be caught almost with the atmosphere which you live in; those terse picturesque expressions that a very short reading of Carlyle teaches one to fall into, and that comprehensive Eclecticism which the current wisdom of the age affords. He was not one to be easily forgotten, and, like all good talkers, had his special brilliancies, which can hardly be defined in general terms. The wonder of that conversation may be a little explained, as perhaps may most wonders; but the first time that it is heard, when it bursts unexpectedly upon a totally new and ignorant hearer, it sounds very grand, and does indeed call forth a deep, hearty tribute of admiration.

It was a strange lightening and widening of her view into existence. She knew nothing of the books or the life which might enable others to talk like him. To her he was not only the clever man that saner eyes would have seen, but he filled up the whole space which her mental vision could embrace. She had always lived in a passive state of intellectual inanition, and now her intellect and heart seemed one: felt thoroughly aroused, fully satisfied.

Both the ladies had sung, and Mr. Erskine had not listened; the other gentlemen had, and had acquitted themselves, like Englishmen, of their evening's duty. The sound of Mr. Lewis's voice aroused Georgy.

"Erskine, offer Miss Sandon some wine and water; the ladies are going."

Mr. Lewis did not stand contradiction at any time, and there was nothing, alas! in this proposition which could be denied. Presently the ladies were on their way up stairs, and Mr. Erskine had bowed to Georgy, leaving her with the impression that he was more at a distance from her than when he had first said "How do you do?" She had expected, as a matter of course, that he would shake hands with her. He had that perfect self-possession which, with a most good-natured gentle manner, can sometimes awe one into a distance again, after seeming to claim a certain degree of intimacy, almost a right to it. Georgy

went up stairs, quite oblivious of the ladies and those dresses which had made her feel her own nothingness so intensely but a few hours before. She had no thought for the future that night; her happiness had no connection with her outer life; the form of that was decided upon, and the thought of her marriage did not come before her more prominently, or weigh upon her more than usual. The consciousness that such an one as James Erskine existed was enough, and seemed to give an end and aim to her whole being. She was glad to know that he was in the world—to think that she should sometimes see him: glad without any afterthought. She did not love him: there would have appeared a degree of profanity and presumption in the thought; but she never did think it. She woke up once or twice in the night with her heart still beating, and still happy, as children are before a great treat or some anticipated holiday.

CHAPTER V.

JAMES ERSKINE was a lawyer; and the grass, trees, and quiet of Millthorpe Grange would almost have sufficed to put him in a good humour after the dust and glare of London. Perhaps it was because of his new-found enjoyment of autumnal beauties that he stayed on so pertinaciously at the old hall. Perhaps he took pleasure in Mr. Lewis's society: he certainly found a wondrous deal to say to him, and appeared to enjoy that crotchety, dull man's ways more than most of his other friends did. Poor Mrs. Lewis was very suddenly indisposed, and did not appear downstairs for nearly a fortnight; Mrs. Lawrence was most of the day with her, writing to Mr. Lawrence, or working for the children. She had no natural love of gossip: and husband, housekeeping, and babies, absorbed her too much to leave her any leisure for speculating on the thoughts and actions of others. She was one of those women who are so thoroughly absorbed in matrimony that they possess, apart from that, no individuality. Kind soul! she had charity and forgiveness for every one, except

women who had married without love. There was a gentle intolerance about her on that subject, which one often sees in those who have known or seen hardly anything beyond their own fortunate experience: theirs *is* the happiest lot; but they do not always remember that it came to them; they did not find it.

Whilst Georgy and Mr. Erskine had each half-unconsciously begun the game that has sometimes been played before, she sat by quite unconscious. Her life was complete, and she never speculated upon that of others. In her own way, she was a pleasant person to have staying in the house; for, simple, and devoid of malice, she was always ready to admire other people's beauty and cleverness, and those with whom she never came in competition always liked her, and forgave her the good looks on which she never prided herself.

Georgy and Mr. Erskine were far more thrown together than most people who are visiting at the same house. They sat together through long mornings in the library, whilst Mr. Lewis was—I don't quite know where. Mr. Erskine made a show of writing, and reading the newspaper; Georgy made a show of going to busy herself most deeply up-stairs, and always thought when she had been there for half an hour that a most unconscionable time had elapsed. So most of the morning they sat and talked in the

old oak wainscotted room, till the sunshine, which first came in through the large east window, was shining full through the three small south ones, resting on the books, and brightening up the tarnished leaves and acorns of the old-fashioned gilt frames which surrounded two looking-glasses: glasses which ministered not to vanity, for they distorted the face most painfully, and gave it a greenish colour.

Now they rode with Mr. Lewis, and now took walks alone; and when Georgy went to the garden for flowers, Mr. Erskine asked, with great innocence,—" Might not he go too? "

They must certainly have been good company for each other, judging from appearances. The inequality which there was between them, made it, on Georgy's part, like a child's liking for a grown-up person.

When two people are together, one well versed in knowledge of the world and of life; the other, ignorant of all save the feelings of one eager heart, their position must be very unequal. Georgy would speak and act sometimes in a way that might have seemed compromising to a woman of the world, only she never regarded herself of sufficient importance to be compromised. Each word, each look of his, made an indelible impression upon her; and yet Mr. Erskine could not in all equity be blamed. What is often called flirting is but the give and take of

society. One person cannot always tell the moral position of the other, or the impression which every unstudied word may produce. Many would start back with astonishment were it revealed to them in whose lives they have made the deepest marks.

Mr. Erskine was totally ignorant of what Georgy really felt for him. She pleased him for the moment, and he was too incessantly occupied to measure to a nicety the effect these pleasant hours might have upon her. Had he known the work which he was doing, he would assuredly have left it undone. Nay more, if any active kindness could have brightened the child's life, she would have received it from him, had he realised her wants.

They talked on all subjects, excepting that Georgy disliked making mention of Grainthorpe: to have been there was enough, without being condemned to talk about it. She told him many things, only never recurred to that somewhat prosaic actuality of her engagement: she several times thought of doing so, and once or twice an idea of disloyalty seemed to attach itself to the omission; but that was only a momentary reflection. "What mattered it to him whether she was engaged or not? and what need was there to mention such things to him?" so she never brought herself to do it. The joy of the day was sufficient unto itself: to like him was enough; that he should like her seriously, was an idea which

she never entertained for a moment, but "it was very good of him to talk to her a little." She made herself pleasant, too, to him; what power, what capacity, she had, was all poured out so genuinely before him. It is not often that we are our whole selves to any one; either we take too much from them, and can only please them by an hearty attempt at a self-stereotype; or timidity in ourselves, or want of sympathy from them, keep back a part of our personality. A little more worldly wisdom, and Georgy might have made calculations as to what men liked in women, thought before she spoke, and been a nice person, perhaps; only not herself.

So the first days passed, and to-morrow, Mrs. Erskine, James's mother, Mrs. Lumsden, and a corresponding complement of gentlemen would arrive to increase the party. Mrs. Lewis was down-stairs again, and all the morning she engrossed Mr. Erskine; then in the afternoon he had been walking with Mr. Lewis. Mrs. Lawrence had driven to Eastham, that she might do some shopping for the children; and Georgy, who had thought during the morning that three was a decidedly bad number for society, wandered about alone in the afternoon all through the shrubberies, where a warm wind was rustling among the stiff green hollies. Then she went into the garden, whence she brought a whole basketful of asters: they looked so gorgeous on that

dull afternoon, when nothing else bright was to be seen. After she had put them in the large China bowls on the staircase, she sat down alone in the drawing-room.

She *could* play, and had a very great gift of music; though, to her aunt's disappointment, who thought that playing did not make a show, she had no voice. There are times when, for a short while, passion can supply the place of genius: people can write verses, and good ones too, who would never again be capable of so rising above the ordinary conditions of their capacity, any more than a man who could not ride, could again take the leap which he did under stress of circumstances. Perhaps Georgy never again played to herself as she did then; so many recollections of her childhood, which seemed to have returned to her like reminiscences of fairy land, came brightly back. Then all the present, the present of those few days, which was too beautiful to be told out in any fashion—she was saying it through the music, as best she could; dreaming till her actual love was momentarily lost in the contemplation of that love. Her tears fell fast, and still she did not cease her playing; she was excited, and yet nothing startled her. It was only the fulfilment of her dream, when the folding-door was pushed open, and Mr. Erskine came out of the

library. She knew his footstep without turning her head, and she stopped.

"Do you keep your beautiful playing a secret, dear lady?" he asked, and leaned over the pianoforte.

There was a sense of mastery and possession somehow expressed in those low, quiet words, that could not have been felt better if he had called her by her name. Only the intimacy seemed all on his side, and she would have felt nearer to him if he had called her Georgy.

"It is not worth while to play, Mrs. Lawrence and Mrs. Lewis sing so well: and then playing is never called for."

"But do play some more now, if you are not tired: what is that you have just finished?"

"Only my own fancy."

"Can't you fancy it over again?"

She tried, but reality had dispelled it, and the music only came stammeringly forth the second time: so she played soft airs of Chopin's, and then fragments of Beethoven: which should precede no other music, for nothing can express the calm of passion like his. She played her very best, and it began to grow dark; still he did not seem weary of listening, and was leaning over the piano, with his face, so full of intelligence and gentleness, very near hers.

"I must go now," she said: he made no opposition, but bent down still a little nearer, and putting up a lock of her hair, that was loose, half-laid his hand on her head for a moment, and then helped her to shut up the pianoforte. After this he made Mrs. Lewis ask her to play in the evenings, besides always reminding her of it himself. He would have done the same out of kindness to any one who had appeared to him to be thrown at all in the background. She waited now every night to be asked—or told by him to play. Whatever he might have bidden her do, she would have done it.

CHAPTER VI.

GEORGY did not much relish the new arrivals of the next day ; her *tête-à-tête* was broken in upon, never perhaps to be resumed. That Georgy would have liked Mrs. Erskine, had she been possessed of but half a claim to liking, there was no doubt ; but to like her was not difficult : few could have done otherwise. She was a tall, striking, handsome old lady, rather masculine, in her abrupt vehement manner. But she was only so in outward manner ; in her inner being, she was perfectly feminine. It is so difficult to define why a quiet, well-mannered woman often strikes one after a little acquaintance as not sufficiently feminine. To a woman it is often more quickly discernible than to a man ; not so much from a quicker perception, as that it is much less carefully veiled from her. Such a woman does not affect to be masculine in any way, and yet there is an instinctive feeling that something feminine is wanting ; and that want is perhaps the faculty of heartily looking up to any one person or thing greater than herself. Mrs. Erskine always had had this, and had it still.

After an unhappy first marriage, she wedded, when no longer young, Mr. Erskine. She worshipped her gentle and reserved husband, more yielding outwardly than herself, and never dreamt of trying to govern him; indeed, the people she loved always governed her, in spite of her positive, decided manner, and commanding air. Now that her husband was dead, more of her affections were given to James than to the children of her first marriage. She could not help it; they had only their own share of love, and her youngest son received both his and his father's. The house at Monklands, not far off, was hers; but except when any of her children were with her, she was little in it. She had lived many years there with Mr. Erskine, but justice forbade her to leave it to Mr. Erskine's son; and that was the true reason why she no longer cared for the place. Besides, her daughters had thought it dull, and persuaded their mother to go away from it; and now that they were married, Mrs. Erskine had lost the habit of living there.

Georgy always contrived to be near the old lady; indeed it was a very pleasant neighbourhood, she was so witty and kindly, so warm-hearted and unsophisticated: then Georgy made her talk, and she fell into the snare, and often talked about her own concerns. Georgy had never remembered that some people in the world must know Mr. Erskine inti-

mately besides his mother; all the people here knew him, and seemed to live on strangely oblivious of that privilege, bearing it very lightly. Mrs. Lumsden generally spoke of him as Jim Erskine: she boldly affirmed that he admired her, and declared that he was a capital fellow, and that she doated on him: "indeed he had two inestimable qualities in a man. He would make a delightful lover and a perfect husband; so few had capacity enough for both."

Mrs. Lumsden was a rattling, well-dressed, little woman, with a lovely pink and white complexion; well-mannered, well-bred, in the drawing-room for the first half-hour, or perhaps evening, but of thoroughly bad style in reality: she was quick, and had entire confidence in herself, saying whatever first occurred to her. Mrs. Erskine had rather a distaste for the little lady; and it was amusing to see her disapprobation, and then her perfect good-nature. She admired her spirit; though she said it was carrying it off bravely—"when you knew that a person did not like you, to declare that they worshipped you."

The whole party were lounging about in the drawing-room after breakfast, and Mrs. Lumsden had rushed into an epitome of a French book, not much adapted for the perusal of quiet English families. Mrs. Lewis was silent; and Mrs. Erskine, for a wonder, had not read it, but only heard of it:

for there was no one more voracious than she was for novels, or who indulged more freely in French literature; although she occasionally preached against it.

"You really should read Marguerite's adventures: Jim Erskine surely has the book—he ought."

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Mrs. Erskine; "perhaps he may—he reads a good many French books, I believe: I do not like French books."

She had assumed what they called her demure face; and Mrs. Lewis and Georgy were laughing to themselves.

"But you will forgive poor Marguerite at last."

"Poor who?—I am very deaf, my dear—I really do not understand French books: the language has changed so now, that old people can hardly be said to understand it. You can ask my son, Mr. Erskine, if you wish it. He reads French, I believe."

It was of no use; she was hopelessly stern, and bent upon making a demonstration in favour of English decorum that morning; so Mrs. Lumsden dropped the conversation.—When she was gone, Mrs. Lewis and Georgy showered down a torrent of reproaches on Mrs. Erskine, who bore them very patiently, only saying "that she supposed old people were made to be laughed at."

Mrs. Lumsden was happy in the afternoon: she had proposed charades on a small scale; Mrs. Lewis

approved, and Mr. Lewis had adopted the suggestion. More young ladies were coming, and charades would be a capital amusement. The house was in confusion; rooms, doorways, and dresses were discussed. Mrs. Lumsden took it for granted that she was to be heroine, and the others acquiesced in her expectations.

"Mrs. Lumsden is a clever little woman," said Mrs. Lewis to Georgy, when they were alone together.

"Clever!" exclaimed Georgy, opening her eyes.

"Well, don't catch me up so severely with your lofty ideas: clever means everything now-a-days—one never gives it a precise definition—it does for any sharp piece of assurance, as well as for the great ones of the earth."

"Georgy, will you stay for the charades?"

"Thank you, I shall be obliged to go home before the great day; my aunt is going away, and so will want me to be housekeeper at Grainthorpe."

Mr. Erskine was set upon by Mrs. Lumsden, and begged to join in the acting; but he had not the slightest inclination to be pressed into the service. Nobody submitted more humbly to being ordered about, if he pleased it, and nobody was sometimes more gently impassible:—"He was old and worn out; could not act, and did not know how to act, and had never been able to learn anything by

heart: and then, too, he must go in a couple of days."

Mrs. Lumsden, who had decided that he should be hero, was vexed; and Mrs. Lewis laughed at him, declaring that his refusals assumed an air of fatuity;—still he would not: and from the time that he privately declared to Georgy that Mrs. Lumsden had assumed a tone of genteel slang that was quite insufferable, Georgy's judgment of her became more lenient.

There was an animated discussion at breakfast the next day concerning dresses and play-books, some of which were to be found at Monklands, hidden away after an orderly and undiscoverable manner. Mrs. Erskine could not drive there that day, and she maintained that the servants had not the discretion necessary for finding dresses and choosing books; whilst everybody else said that they must be had. Mr. Erskine had dined out the night before, and was not yet returned—so he was not available. Georgy offered to ride over and choose them; and as Monklands could not be more than eight miles off by the fields, it was quite feasible, and was agreed to directly.

The ride was a pretty one, on that bright autumn day, across fields and through rough narrow lanes, every tree and bush rich with mellow changing hues. Part of the way was along a broad road, whence the

whole valley could be seen, and in the distance purple, heathery hills; in one place stood some glorious beech-trees, overshadowing the whole road; then through narrow stony lanes again—bad for either riding or driving—and endless fir covers, bordering sometimes on one side of the road, and sometimes on the other; now past the back of a country-house, with nothing seen from the road but the stable-roof through the trees; through another fir plantation; then down a steep hill, and through a burn which was often high in winter, flooding the banks, and sometimes carrying away the foot-bridge, but was now more like a few clear stony pools than a stream. At last Georgy arrived at the gate at Monklands, a rambling little house, with two flights of gray stone steps leading up to the drawing-room windows; which were neither on the ground-floor, nor yet did they belong to the first story.

The pony had lost a shoe, and, first of all, that must be replaced. The housemaid said “there was a blacksmith, she supposed, in the village;” but she did not seem to think either ponies or blacksmiths in her province. “The village was two miles off, and there would be a blacksmith there, she supposed,”—and presently, as she was perfectly aware of these two facts, she described his residence. Her suppositions involved no uncertainty; for in that part of the country, were you to ask anybody if their next-

door neighbour be dead, they would answer—"I suppose so,"—had they themselves attended his funeral. The groom, who had come with Georgy, set off to find the aforesaid blacksmith; and Georgy, who began to explore the house, soon found books and dresses.

The books were in a little room that had once been a school-room, and in the closet there were still relics of children. Georgy turned over a torn book or two, looked into a little portfolio containing a drawing of some cottages, with trees growing conveniently by, and a bridge which crossed a river just where a tree was likewise growing: but this drawing was incomplete, the foliage of the tree being yet unfinished: some child had done it a long, long while ago. There were also a battered battledore, and the skeletons of some shuttlecocks. In the bookcase was a medley of books—the refuse of the house. Odd volumes of sermons, and old English novels, that we, who have learnt the refinements of sentiment at the feet of France and Germany, ignore. There was all manner of obsolete and useless literature, and on the lower shelf, a thick, old Bible, bound in shining purple leather, which looked clumsy in this day of Church Services and Bibles, with their clasps, crosses, and embossed covers.

This Bible had been "a present to James Erskine, from his affectionate father, on his departure to school

for the first time:" so said the inscription on the title-page. It had been thumbed a little, but, on the whole, had been well preserved. How long had it been here, in this out-of-the-way shelf? What a whole childish history that book told: that present to a good boy! *Then or now!* He was something different then. There is nothing that we look back to with such wistful yearning, as the childhood of those we love: the days we have had no part in, and if we had, we should be, most likely, without that longing love of ours. We are strange to those days; almost the only strange days of which we have no jealousy. It is a pretty dream to sit and think of, a very pleasant story to wring even the most trivial nothings from the lips of some unsuspecting friend, who finds a most patient listener: even if the retrospect be sad, there is no jealousy there.

By and by the housekeeper came, a talkative elderly woman, who would entertain Miss Sandon, and offered to walk with her round the garden. She looked upon herself almost as joint possessor of Monklands with Mrs. Erskine. "Her father had rented yon farm of the mistress's father, and her brother had it now. When she was just a bit lassie, gannin about in bye, and had never taken a situation, the mistress had offered her the place of housemaid, and she had been with her someways ever since."

It was not easy to stop Mrs. Hoy's tongue when it was once unloosed, and she continued to pour forth apologies for the unkept state of the garden.

"We had a fine show of greenhouse plants once, but now the mistress is so little at home, the expense is no good. The garden is a pretty one, though, and a large one. Mr. Charles should come back from travelling, and settle down here, and keep his mother company; it is lonesome for her here, now that Miss Julia has got married."

"You have been a long time with Mrs. Erskine."

"Deed have I. When I first knowed the mistress, she was Mistress Grey, and Miss Alice was a baby. Mr. Grey was a kind gentleman, and I was partial to him, poor man; though he was not so canny altogether as Mr. Erskine. I was at the mistress and Mr. Erskine's wedding, and a bonny bride she made, when I had finished the dressing of her: I was her maid then; she was not a worldly-minded woman, and was well satisfied with my dressing, though I wasn't a London body."

All the family were sacred in her eyes. She even felt it her duty to speak well of Mr. Grey, he having been so nearly related to the mistress.

She gave Georgy a nosegay of China roses, mignonne, and whatever flowers yet remained, pressed them on her, and would take no denial; for, as she would have expressed it, "she was partial to Miss

Sandon, who had pleased her." Georgy grew anxious at last for the pony, but it had not arrived yet; so she went again into the house and sat down in the school-room, made up a heap of books which she would carry, and tied up a bundle of dresses which the servant was to take. She heard the steps of the pony on the gravel, but never looked up until the door opened. It was neither the housemaid nor Mrs. Hoy who darkened the entrance, but Mr. Erskine.

Georgy's face brightened involuntarily as she looked up at him. "You here, dear lady! What errand have you come on?"

"To get books and dresses for the charades. My pony lost a shoe, and I really think that they are manufacturing the iron as well as the shoe."

"Well, never mind: hasn't Mrs. Hoy given you something to eat?"

"She made faint offers, but I refused them, for I did not think that she seemed quite confident about it."

"I will go and see."

Presently he returned with the news that "Mrs. Hoy would give them some tea: unless, indeed, Miss Sandon would like whisky better."

In time, a sort of tea-luncheon arrived, and some whisky also.

"You needn't look so disdainfully," he said; "it is

very good, though you have never probably been allowed to have any."

"Very likely."

"Will you take some?"

"Yes."

"Now, wait, I will drink to you, lady, all manner of good and happiness. What do you wish for most in life? I am sure that your desires, whatever they may be, have a resolute quaintness of their own."

"Now you need not bestow that equivocal approbation upon me," she answered, laughing: "I am very reasonable: I only wish to have my own way, which is but a trifle; and you—you wish for the approbation of others, besides that, I should think."

"Do we positively come here for the purpose of preaching sermons?"

"I hear enough at other times," she answered demurely; and the luncheon proceeded.

"Look how it is raining—when will the servant come back?"

"But, Miss Sandon, we are very comfortable—why should we trouble ourselves about it? You know if anything happens, I can drive you back."

"How furiously it is raining!"

"Like in summer."

"Can you not speak grammar?" and they both burst out laughing—those hearty, gay laughs at nothing which children give, and people when they

are in love, when they are happy. There must be some wondrous spirit, surely, in that laughter which a bystander cannot always participate in: it is not clever; but did the most ineffable witticism ever make you laugh so? I think not. They laughed a great deal that day; he talked the most, and she listened, hearing his talk and his deep hearty bursts of laughter, provoked by her solemnly demure retorts, with almost unspeakable enjoyment. The groom did not return till late in the afternoon. "Willie Burn, the blacksmith, was away at a wedding;" and when he had found the said Willie, "Willie had been getting a drink, and would do no work that day;" so the groom was obliged to find another smith, and on the road had probably refreshed himself a little. Mr. Erskine bade him go and get some dinner. "The pony," he remarked, "was not safe for Miss Sandon; she had far better drive home in his dog-cart."

"Eh! but the pony is all right, sir; and Miss Sandon is not such a bad one for riding."

"Miss Sandon, you had really much better drive home with me; he is not very sober: I really think you ought."

"Very well," said Georgy, recklessly.

"Miss Sandon will let me drive her home, and you can lead the pony." They did not go home immediately, for the rain was still an excuse; and

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they sat at the school-room window, whilst the leaves of the sycamore trees, still green in that sheltered place, and whose branches had stood out richly against the blue sky half an hour ago, were dripping with the heavy rain-drops. They sat there till the rain had ceased, and then rambled about the garden till the sun began to set, Mr. Erskine having invented many ingenious excuses for not starting.

"We must go now," said Georgy, desperately, at last: and they did go, packing books and dresses in the dog-cart. They talked sentiment all the way home, discussing manifold generalities and truths, which need no literary authorities to maintain them—they find many living expositions. Such conversation amused Mr. Erskine; and he did it remarkably well.

Georgy was probably interested too, for her heart was beating, and her temples throbbing, as she felt her face flush more and more with excitement. Mr. Erskine was an eminently social man, and could mould himself instinctively to whoever was his neighbour for the time; not out of calculation, but through the abundant kindness of his genial nature. Is not sentiment become almost one of the fine arts? He made no conscious application of any one word to the lady beside him: indeed his thoughts had wandered off to some dream that he may once have had, and he talked really for the pleasure of talking.

This give and take of society, however, had been considerably prolonged: there are some limitations to it after all. It was dark when they reached the avenue of Millthorpe Grange, and as Mr. Erskine drove over the grass and against the shrubs, Georgy felt the fresh drops from the branches fall upon her face; and then in a moment afterwards it was an unpleasant jar, to have returned to lights, people, and Millthorpe Grange.

They were all at dinner when the missing guests arrived: there was no escaping up-stairs, however, and they were greeted with laughing inquiries from Mr. Lewis, who appeared at the dinner-room door—as to what they had been about? and where they had been? Mr. Erskine explained with a good deal of gravity how he had come round by Monklands that morning, and found Miss Sandon there. How her pony had lost a shoe. How all the blacksmiths in the village were in liquor, and at weddings; likewise the excited state of the servant: which, unfortunately, was perfectly true; and even when the pony was shod, how much safer it was to drive Miss Sandon home.

“But, my dear James,” said his mother, “because a pony has once lost a shoe, it is not necessarily unsafe ever afterwards: could not you have got back earlier?”

“We made all the haste possible, I assure you,

mother. Driving was decidedly much safer after the violent rain; and when it was growing dark, too, riding would have been impracticable."

Mr. Erskine seemed so persuaded that they had got home rather early than otherwise, that his mother and Mrs. Lewis accepted his view of the matter.

"Won't you have the soup back again?" said the latter.

"Oh! we had a luncheon that was many dinners in itself, I assure you."

Georgy half smiled at this assurance, and then she disappeared, to take off her habit. When the ladies were lighting their candles on the staircase at bed-time, Georgy said, "I am glad you have explained everything so well: I think Mr. Lewis was rather scandalized at our being so late for dinner."

"Always take a high ground, and never lose your self-possession; then one can get through anything," he answered; and Georgy startled Mrs. Lewis by a fit of laughing at Mr. Erskine's sedate philosophy.

Mrs. Lewis had hardly ever seen Georgy and Mr. Erskine together, except during the last few days: then nothing had struck her, but now she was startled, and reflected that it was just as well that Georgy was going away next day. "Good night, Georgy," said Mrs. Erskine, in a sharp, good-natured way, "I hope you have enjoyed your day at Monk-lands."

She did not quite approve of the proceeding, but was inclined to be lenient: if James had asked anybody to drive with him, and stay with him all day, it was very natural to do so. Indeed, had James made advances to anybody, and that sensible person repelled them, showing no appreciation of James, she would doubtless have respected such an admirable woman: but I have often wondered how far she would have forgiven her. She meant, however, to ask James, "How in the world he could?" &c.: but then a letter which she must write to Julia pre-occupied her, and she forgot James and his misdeeds.

Never but this once could Mr. Erskine have been actually blamed for his conduct towards Georgy; and one drive, one afternoon spent at Monklands, was perhaps a venial fault. We often blame the world, when it is our own want of knowledge of it that is at fault. What may appear at one time a heartless mystification, at another is but an amusing incident.

When do we judge rightly?

Certainly not in the case of those whom we often proclaim to be heartless: they are more expansive, and more fully endowed with the capacity of pleasing others, than most of their neighbours. They have no greater love of approbation than the rest of the world; but the effects of their pleasing are far more

visible. Then, without consideration or reflection, they are frequently classed, in a summary way, as "agreeable, but heartless:" and their whole character is supposed to be well hit off.

Georgy was up early the next day, wandering about the garden without her bonnet, and Mr. Erskine came out too.

"Are you tired after yesterday's drive, Miss Sandon?"

"Not at all."

"I shall long remember our yesterday's ramble and drive together." She looked at him, and they smiled into each other's eyes. Then they walked back to the house talking of, most likely, the weather.

That morning was one of departures. Mrs. Erskine was going to join her daughter; she looked up from a letter that she was writing. "Georgy, my dear, I hope I shall soon see you again; some day, you must come and visit me in the south."

"I should like that very much."

"Mind you write, and tell me if you are going to be married, or if anything pleasant happens to you."

"Matrimony being pleasant, of course?"

"Have it your own way, my dear; perhaps you would dislike it: perhaps young ladies generally do; I won't contradict you;"—and so she bade Georgy

a very affectionate adieu, half hinting that her position at Grainthorpe was a very uncomfortable one.

"You have neither father nor mother, poor child, and it is no treason to wish you at least a house of your own some day."

Georgy always felt the unseemliness of ever complaining of Grainthorpe; but she committed another error, for she built too much upon even a chance-word of sympathy from anybody. Mr. Erskine had decided upon going two days ago: it was perhaps only a coincidence, but it was just when well assured that Mrs. Everett was not coming any more to the Grange. There was talking in the hall just before he went. Mr. Lewis was irate against the children's little dog, which it was rumoured had run after a hare, though without the slightest chance of catching it: he was delivering a tirade against dogs in general, and especially the dog which one's wife protected. "Never let any wife of yours keep dogs, Erskine, if you wish for peace."

"How many wives does he think I anticipate?" said Mr. Erskine to Georgy; "and why am I to be tormented before my time with the thoughts of that last evil?"

"There is but one evil that a man has to meet of necessity," she answered bitterly, but laughing—"death; and a woman must look for death *and* matrimony."

"Hush, dear young lady," he said, with a hearty suppressed laugh, almost under his breath, at this formula of desperation. He bade good-bye to the elder ladies, and then to her.

"You must have enough of Grainthorpe on the whole, I should think," he remarked, hearing Mrs. Lewis making arrangements for her departure. He said it with his kindly, gentle smile, which lighted up a face that looked so strong and so enduring: gentleness in such takes a firmer hold of the recollection, and the remembrance of it lies nearer and longer next the heart, than that of any other charm can do.

Algy caught tight hold of his coat, begging that he would stay and cut more sticks for him; and when the impossibility of such a course was demonstrated, "Then I'll ride of the carriage with ye," said Algy, in the true guttural dialect.

"How the child talks! he must have a south country nurse," burst out Mr. Lewis, irritated.

Mr. Erskine perched the troublesome urchin upon a table, and got unimpeded into the carriage: he was going, in spite of Algy's entreaty. The pleasure which Georgy took in watching his high spirits and vigorous enjoyment of everything, was past. "She would feel young if she saw him often." Presently he was gone, and then she hated herself, and her scoffing tone, her last words, and the disloyalty of them.

Georgy left Millthorpe Grange that afternoon, repeating to herself that "she was quite happy and well contented with her pleasant visit." She watched them arranging all things for the projected charades, about which in themselves she felt supremely indifferent; but even the smallest events in that house were so connected with the people whom she loved that she envied others their participation in them. The new guests arrived also, and were all busily engaged about pleasant nothings; whilst their happiness was tenfold exaggerated in Georgy's eyes. James Erskine would come back some day when she was not there, and sit talking to those brilliant, showy girls, as he had done to her. She had no part in anything here, and her eyes felt dim sometimes, and there was a choking in her throat.

Georgy had had no youth—none: the only thing of youth which she knew was this longing; and when would it subside? She wished to be old, that it might die away: a more reasonable wish, perhaps, than that of children who wish to be grown up, that they may suffer. And again she repeated to herself, "She must live the rest of her life without him."

If he had only once called her by her own name! She had had a capricious desire that he should do so; thought, hoped, and calculated: but he had not. He had been familiar enough with her to warrant

it; as familiar as if he had spoken her name fifty times. It would not have brought them nearer; but she had wished it, in a way totally unreasonable even to herself: and "Georgy" would have sounded more pleasantly to her for evermore. "Call me by my name," is a thought which often rises in the heart, and almost to the lips, as we part from some one whom we have little hope of meeting again, none of forgetting. It was natural that Georgy should long to hear it once from him. She had read his present character truly; for she had the quick discernment which sometimes belongs to people who live very much alone: it is a knowledge they seem to arrive at, even from the rarity of events, ideas, or persons that have crossed their lives. Looks and words make a keen impression on them; and they have sometimes an intuitive understanding of those who pass them by half unnoticed. Georgy knew that James Erskine did not care for her, in the full acceptance of the word; she did not take the events of these past days at one iota more than their worth; and yet this man, this happiness which he had given her, and in which she had no faith and no belief, was her very life. He had lived in the world, if not *for* the world; it had spoilt him, perhaps: the people in it, no less than circumstances; for he had always been prosperous. He had not followed up his profession very ardently;

his father's money had saved him from that toilsome necessity.

In some degree, but not altogether, she had judged him rightly. Those who are shut out from the world, always judge harshly of it. Concerning herself she had no delusions: all the madness and intoxication of youth were there; but she had measured her position with the cold quiet glance of an older person, and she knew perfectly how she stood towards him. His head was full of a thousand other things besides her: he did not know what he had done; if he had, he would surely have given her some very excellent advice, and generalized from a sober and disenchanting point of view, as prettily as he had done from a sentimental one.

But he did not know. We seldom do know when it would be better that we should.

CHAPTER VII.

LUNCHEON, or rather children's dinner, was over at Grainthorpe, Aunt Jane was out, and Georgy sat working in the drawing-room, while Poppy, the youngest of the three children, was playing with her doll, sometimes diversifying her game by rubbing her rosy cheeks against the window.

"There's a gentleman and a pretty horse coming up the drive, but Poppy likes the horse best."

"It is Mr. Ledward, I suppose—he will give Poppy a ride on his horse, if she says 'How d'ye-do,' and asks him nicely."

It was not Mr. Ledward's step—it reminded Georgy of some one else: this, though, was only fancy, because she was just then thinking of that person. She interrupted neither work nor thoughts till she heard Bessy's voice.

"Neither the mistress nor the master is in, sir."

She had let him into the house before she announced this, and she had no idea that Miss Georgy's society was desirable to the visitor.

"All the ladies out? Miss Sandon too?"

"She'll be in, sir," Bessy answered, politely.

Georgy got up quickly, and came forward from the work-table in the window to meet Mr. Erskine, still holding in one hand the brown Holland cover which she was making. She was quite confused: the idea of his calling at such an out-of-the-way place as Grainthorpe had never occurred to her, and she wished everything were not so ugly. She pushed some of the brown Holland under her chair, but still held one cushion-cover in her hand; and he began to pull about a piece of stuff not yet begun upon.

"Mr. Sandon asked me here once, but I have never even had the pleasure of calling to acknowledge his kindness. I am down here so seldom, and now Mr. Sandon is unfortunately not at home."

"I hope that he may be back presently."

"And you have been here since we last met?"

"I am always here."

"And what do you do?"

"Nothing: or make brown Holland covers, as you see."

Georgy did not know how uncomfortably the place struck him as he glanced round the room. Bessy had been washing the cold dingy-looking oil-cloth, which covered the floor in the doorway; there was no fire in the empty grate,—a needless omission where coals are so cheap. The room was a parlour

rather than a drawing-room: a huge straight-backed sofa, two solid arm-chairs, almost immovable, the others very high and uncomfortable, a pianoforte, a table or two, and a little bookcase, constituted the furniture. On the centre table, and right in the middle of it, was a large smart inkstand, but no blotting-book—nothing to indicate that it was meant for use; an old *Book of Beauty*, an almanac, and a weekly newspaper, made up the literature. There was neither picture nor print on the walls; over the high old-fashioned chimney-piece, decorated with long wreaths of flowers carved in wood, was a narrow looking-glass; on the mantel-shelf a little clock was flanked by two gaudy china vases, and a pair of decidedly ugly candlesticks with crystal drops. Mr. Erskine looked at these dreary decorations, which resembled those of an unfrequented inn, but made no remark.

It was cold; and so was Georgy's hand, which he had taken on entering. All the flowers were gone now, except some China roses, which Georgy had been putting into a vase with some "immortelles;" but they would not intermix properly, and the arrangement was a failure.

"You have still a few roses left, I see."

"Yes; but nothing else—the 'immortelles' are not pretty flowers, in spite of the name."

"No,—but I have a sort of veneration for them;

one sees them in churchyards abroad, in little convent-chapels, and they appear as often in French novels as poplar trees."

"French stories! I like them. I had a French governess when I was a child; she was very kind to me, and I have loved all French things since then."

"You are so old now, it must be long since you were a child, my dear Miss Sandon; but again—what *do* you do here?"

"You can see," laughing; "here is the drawing-room, there the garden. Sometimes I go to Eastham; and once a-year to a ball; and sometimes I go out to tea, and I *have* even dined out."

He fixed his eyes curiously on the little book-shelf, containing a great part of the family library. A whole row of French fairy tales, and all Voltaire's works, in little brown old-fashioned volumes, stood side by side with the *British Essayists*, and the *British Theatre*; a stage edition of the *Stranger*, the *Fatal Marriage*, and other tragic horrors, were close to Blair's *Sermons* and Mrs. Trimmer's *History of the Bible*, Hume's *History of England*, and the *Percy Anecdotes*.

"Are you looking at the books?"

"Yes; but you get others sometimes, surely?"

"Sometimes, but not very often."

"Do you read all the French books?"

"Yes,—my aunt learnt a great part of *La Henriade* by heart when she was at school, and has derived from that a deep conviction of the instructive but dry nature of Voltaire's works. And then I read the fairy tales, and tell them to Poppy, who is not a French scholar yet."

"And besides that?"

"Besides that I have read Hume" (with an air of dignity), "and when I was little, knew those plays very well: they lived with me at grandmamma's, and when poor grandmamma died, they were sent here with me. Some other children and I had serious thoughts of representing *The Stranger* once. Since that I have rather forgotten my dramatic lore."

"Now, really, this is a pretty account to give of your readings, Miss Sandon!"

He could not help being interested in the mention of grandmamma and the old books. She spoke of them sadly, though she did not mean to do so. The little girl's life was not a pleasant one, and he was sorry for her. He was right: though the discomfort of the house had struck him even unreasonably. People who have lived in luxurious rooms all their lives, sometimes feel an undue sensation of pity for those whom they find in the little sitting-room of a humble house. If they were there themselves for a few days they would forget the change and be equally

happy, so far as rooms are concerned. It was not actual poverty or the meanness of the house which was uncomfortable, but the whole place looked thoroughly uninviting; without any adequate reason for its being so.

"Will you show me your garden?"

"Yes;" and she pushed up the sash of the window, which was almost level with the gravel walk.

"You will catch cold."

"No; it is mild to-day, and the garden is not large."

They walked round the garden, and passed under the fir trees. The afternoon was quite still; but there was a low, dull roar of waves, which a two days' gale had left, and a white line of foam was visible through the gap in the sand-hills: they both watched it for a moment, as though they expected it, by some sudden change or expansion, to diversify the landscape.

Georgy was already growing brighter under Mr. Erskine's influence, whilst he was oppressed by the contemplation of Grainthorpe life.

"Now, you have seen our domain: my aunt must surely be coming soon."

"I know you play a great deal, besides reading fairy tales."

"Shall I play now?" she asked, her eyes dancing with pleasure.

"Oh! yes." And she played very prettily.

"I wish I had ever been to school; the Macbeans had such a good music-master there, and enjoyed it all so much."

"Your desires are not very immoderate," and he felt more sorry still for the little girl. She was telling the loneliness of her life unconsciously.

"My dear Miss Sandon, you will not always live here: there are other pleasant places in the world, even besides school; as I hope you will some day discover."

Now, the wishes which Miss Sandon and Mr. Erskine had been indulging in were happily realized, and Mrs. Sandon appeared.

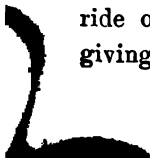
Georgy looked constrained immediately. She introduced Mr. Erskine, who began talking to her aunt, and in a few minutes Mr. Sandon, too, came in. James talked of society and Cochinchina fowls to Aunt Jane. Agreed with her that she must soon leave Grainthorpe, and that it was not worth while to do much to the house: it was not a desirable residence, one could get so little society. She should prefer London for the children as they grew up, if Mr. Sandon's affairs would allow it.

Mr. Erskine advocated London too; and then they entered upon the subject of Cochinchinas. He talked as learnedly as if he had made them his

peculiar study, and related anecdotes of poultry-shows as if their attendance were his especial recreation; he then told Mrs. Sandon where to get her shawl dyed, advised the right colour, and mentioned a good shop. How her stiff aunt came to speak of the shawl, and, on a first acquaintance, to confide her intentions to Mr. Erskine, Georgy never quite understood.

Then Mr. Sandon and his visitor talked business together; concerning which it is to be hoped that the latter knew more than he did of the history of Cochinchina: if he had not, his ignorance would this time have been discerned. But Mr. Sandon pronounced him afterwards to be one of the most sensible fellows he had met for a long time. When he was gone, Aunt Jane declared that he was a most delightful man; and Poppy, who had had a ride upon the brown horse, said that he was "very canny."

He had made a long visit, and had spent nearly the whole afternoon at Grainthorpe. Georgy stitched away at the brown Holland covers, sitting opposite to the chair where he had sat; and the whole room was filled by the remembrance of him. Many a day afterwards did she remind Poppy of her ride on the brown horse, and try to coax her into giving an account of it; but Poppy was happily




not old enough to detect the hypocrisy of the questions. Never had the thought that she was engaged frightened Georgy as it did that evening. And then, again, she took refuge in the dream of that afternoon's visit.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was more than eighteen months after this that Constance Everett was staying at Ilderton with her husband's people. Her husband had rejoined her after he had been abroad; but he fell ill again, and she returned to Italy with him. Soon, however, she wrote home to his family for help and companionship. She was left alone with him in a strange country, and he was mad.

Her husband's brother brought them back, and then there was the usual uncertainty and changing which so often accompany such an illness. First one would stay with him, and then another; but the doctors decreed that he must be quiet and away from friends; so now he was living near Southampton. As letters came, sometimes to say that he was better, sometimes worse, the poor mother still kept up the fiction of slow and gradual improvement.

Old Mr. Everett doated on Constance; Mrs. Everett Mère "saw her faults," and told her of them, "poor, dear thing!"—The two girls and their



two brothers lavished a prodigious quantity of admiration upon her, each in a different way; but the wife of Edgar, the second son, agreed with her mother-in-law in condemnation of Constance's little faults.

It was as dull and decorous a mansion as England could well produce. The girls had been governessed and repressed to the last pitch of human endurance; and, though hardly now daring to say that their souls were their own, only wished for the opportunity of appearing in that phase of English development which we call "a fast girl:" but they had not the cleverness which alone can make such a woman tolerable.


Edgar was kept in order by his wife Louisa; but had an unconquerable propensity to uphold Constance in all things, much to the former lady's displeasure. William, the youngest brother, who was Constance's chief support and comfort, generally thought Ilderton dull, and had serious views of the duties he owed to his friends, in the way of visiting them, whenever he did get leave from his regiment.

That day there had been great romps in Constance's room, which Louisa said was a refuge for all misconducted people. All the French books lived there, for foreign literature was tabooed at Ilderton; people asked for cups of tea, and always drank them

in that room, for Mrs. Everett specially set her face against such things. When the girls insisted that Constance's night-caps were much prettier than any head-dress worn during the day by any other person, William and Edgar raised a disturbance to see them, and Constance ended by parading the passage in a wondrous little cap, which was perfect, William said; but when Louisa appeared on the staircase, the whole party fled to Constance's room, and the cap fell off, and Emmy tore it. Constance gave a vivid representation of the latest French vaudeville; it was as good as one to poor Emmy and Agnes, who had never seen such a thing: in consequence of all this, nobody was down in time.

"Constance has no more conduct than a miss of fifteen," said Louisa.—"How anybody could be so foolish! and, for a woman in her peculiar and trying situation, it was still more odd."

It was the arrival of Sir Hugh Stanley and his sister before most of the party were down, that disconcerted Louisa. Sir Hugh looked up at Louisa's remark, which was not addressed to him, and seemed strongly inclined to begin a defence; when the simultaneous announcement of dinner and the missing people gave every one occupation. Sir Hugh was twenty-four, master of himself and his large fortune, the beloved of mammas and daughters, and a good fellow, well liked by men. He was a gentleman,



handsome and kind-hearted, a little conceited as to his personal appearance, and a little spoiled by being so much run after: it was saying a good deal for him that he was not already detestable. Finally, he had contracted a bad habit of plunging recklessly into all conversations upon all subjects, regardless as to whether he was well-versed in them or not—and he never clearly saw when he was at fault. Unfortunately he had taken a few lessons in water-colours, and his sister made him sing with her; he had a fine voice, but often sang false. He showed more to advantage with Constance than with anybody else: whenever he dared, he looked at her, and liked too well to hear her talk to originate many propositions himself.

Mr. Everett had forgotten to say grace, and his lady-wife called him to order; Constance vowed that although her better nature strove with her inclination, she could not help acquiescing with Charles Lamb on the subject of grace: her appetite was so clamorous that it was a complete distraction to her.

Sir Hugh looked up in grave astonishment, not as to Charles Lamb's opinion, but rather wondering that Mrs. Everett should own to having such an appetite—he never had remarked it in her.

“How capital Charles Lamb's things are,” said he.

“Charles Lamb!” echoed Mrs. Everett the elder,

who felt it incumbent on her to know something of all subjects started at her own table—"Charles Lamb;"—she was evidently at fault. "Oh! how stupid I am!—the husband of that very peculiar Lady Caroline Lamb; Lord Melbourne he was afterwards: one should always give people their proper names."

Her own family could not have dared to set her right. Sir Hugh, however, attempted, without reflecting as to whether it would be agreeable or not.

"The man who wrote Elia, I mean;" he broke in at an ill-timed moment.

"Yes, yes, we know what Lord Melbourne wrote—of course"—the lady answered, not quite pleased.

All things are good in their way, and only in their way. There are so many people who would be really estimable companions if they *only* couldn't read.

One often hears it said that people should not play or draw if they have not a turn for it. Why are not reading and writing included in that maxim? The truth of it, as regards these last, is far oftener forced upon one; and the unfortunate universality of these acquirements militates terribly against the agreeableness of society.

The evening passed far too quickly for Sir Hugh. He came out well by the side of Constance, and was

really pleasant: his tinge of fatuity seemed completely taken out of him. Mrs. Everett and Mrs. Edgar Everett were both inwardly irate at Sir Hugh, whose state of mind was patent; but it would not do to treat him coldly, and give other names an advantage:—"The girls! the girls!" Both the girls, who indulged in a secret hopeless passion for dear, handsome Sir Hugh, envied Constance; but revered her too much to dispute his taste in devoting himself to her.

Louisa remarked, in speaking of some sentimental novel, "that it must be a great happiness to express oneself in such a book, and forget one's own identity, assuming a man's name."

"A great pleasure, certainly," said Constance, "to drop a few incidental allusions to our sex, and make prominent mention of *my* waistcoat, instead of *my* gown; and then comes a piece of peculiarly womanly writing to atone for the first disguise: I shall take the benefit of my sex when I write a book, most certainly."

Louisa did not see that, and the others laughed.

"I think I know my mission," Constance went on; "I'll write a novel with high tendencies. When a woman with high tendencies writes a novel, her hero ends by going into parliament (because his lady love wishes it) on principles of his own,—not exactly Whig or Tory: but such petty details don't signify.

The first night he speaks, and of course is scorned and reviled; a friend's interposition only saves him from being personally insulted. The second night he receives reluctant attention; the third, he excites breathless interest, and a friend in tears clasps his hand. He soon rises to some high place: whether that of prime minister or not is not exactly set forth; but he guides the councils of his country; whilst the angel woman watches over the toiling man."

"Oh, yes! I have it all before me," applauded Sir Hugh.

Constance had a most universal capacity for enjoyment, and took great delight in Sir Hugh; contriving to parade his devotion all the more from her having been annoyed by her good mother-in-law's remarks upon the subject that morning. Both that lady and Louisa mutually encouraged each other in their wrath against Constance's little entertainment with Sir Hugh.

It was not all entertainment to her, though; or at any rate it was a very shallow one:—she had an anxious, tired look, the moment she left off talking and laughing; and said on the staircase, that she must have sleep, and could not stop and talk to the girls; so she kissed them in that way which I have observed lady friends sometimes have of kissing each other.

There is not the slightest need to kiss at all, but

they do it; and in a wooden, mechanical way, as the people in patterns on old Chinese porcelain might, without the slightest unction and with the tip of their lips; thinking, perhaps, the while of the trimming of a gown, or the arranging of a party.

Constance did not go to bed, though, but sat down to write. There were one or two tears in her eyes, which she brushed away with her pretty hand. Tears were a rare occurrence with her; and if they did come, I believe that a book, or music, or a fancy, brought them more quickly than the real events of life would do. But is it not so with very many of us now-a-days? To-night there was less of sentiment and more feeling in those tears: and in truth there was some cause for them.

She was thinking of many things: her early joyous marriage; how much she was in love with Frank Everett—that weak, selfish, and not very sensible man—that good-looking, good-natured, and sometimes remarkably ill-tempered man—and she had waltzed and sung duets with him once, till they danced and sang themselves into love: at least, so they fancied. Then he had neglected her; for he was so little accustomed to consider anybody besides himself: and yet, when he felt at last how thoroughly he had wearied her, and how cold she had grown to him, she had thought then that he had somewhat regretted the love that he had lost. But that was

gone, and it was not in the nature of any earthly circumstances that it should return to him ; none could ask it of her, or judge her for it. And yet he was not altogether bad : the fault seldom lies entirely either with one thing or one person—hardly anything in nature is perfectly black ; but what a relief it would be to all of us very often, if we could blacken aught entirely, and have full reason in our own minds for doing so !

Constance was wishing that she had been a different woman, and that the circumstances of her life had differed also. She was conscious of her superiority to her husband, and to one of her gay and reckless nature, this was a greater misfortune than it would have been to many another. She had grown up in that worship of intellect which clever uneducated people feel, often far more strongly and indiscriminately than those who have been more cultivated, and who have tasted oftener of the fruit of the tree of knowledge : it was not in her nature that her heart should ever go beyond her intelligence.

It was nearly two years since her husband had been ill, and mad ; and a dreary out-look it was for her to think of the many more years of lonely childless marriage which might yet await her. She was cheered now and then by sapient promises from doctors and friends of her husband's recovery : not


that *that* recovery would have added much to her happiness; but poverty, and the dependence which it brought, pressed heavily upon her, and he might have added to her material comforts. She had just received a letter which told her of some amelioration in his state, and she had rather angered Mrs. Everett by her unwillingness to set off to him immediately; but Constance had naturally enough requested a further confirmation of his recovery, and wished to wait a little before she decided. She changed her mind, though, that evening, and wrote to say that she was coming, and resolved to please Mrs. Everett the next day by the announcement of her resolution.

Now all that was settled: and settled the more quickly because she was angry. A letter from Mr. Erskine lay in the depths of her writing-book, which had vexed her for two whole days—a longer time than she mostly allowed anything to do, if she could help it. It was a letter of advice; the first of such a nature that he had ever written her: and “it shall be the last,” thought she. He had been her tried, devoted friend for some years; she had turned to him on all occasions when she had needed help; and well did she know her power over him. He had seen her a few times in London talking to Sir Hugh; he had heard of her at Ilderton and Millthorpe Grange, and always, always Sir Hugh. He could not find any valid excuse for suddenly rushing into her

neighbourhood ; and then what on earth could his being there avail ? he could not mount guard upon Constance at Ilderton, and what were her proceedings, or Sir Hugh's, to him ?

Mr. Erskine was just then a little beside himself : nobody ever intends deliberately to think, feel, and act as they often do ; and for his own peace and comfort, he had never meant to take that desperate interest in his friend Mrs. Everett's reputation which he did. He could not ask his mother too many questions on the subject ; and she would not have comforted him, for she was always glad to make sensible reflections and speak of Constance's imprudence. She had the sixth sense which we always possess for divining the true relations of those we love. She naturally liked Constance, and recognised her fascination, but now she was instinctively afraid of her ; was glad that she had a husband, and wished him long life : indeed, she always caught up any one rather sharply who expressed an opinion that he would never recover.

So Mr. Erskine wrote to Constance, having firmly persuaded himself that she would take it well, and told her that she was talked of, and that the kind world took cognisance of her flirtation with Sir Hugh. He begged her to care for her reputation ; begged her to forgive him ; to forgive the thought and care which he could not but have for her, and his wish



to help her in all her troubles. He was out of spirits when he wrote all this; but, as he was not prone to speak sadly about himself, he only showed it by writing more shortly than usual. He had fancied, however, that the letter was too demonstrative, and had sat for some time biting his pen and deliberating within himself; at last he despatched it, in a fit of strenuous determination not to change again. It would bring forth a kind answer from her surely, he thought.

It brought forth no such thing.

Constance was intensely provoked by this assumption of authority; and she felt a strong inclination to write to him immediately, that she was not "troubled" at all, only had had a slight headache during the week. Her mother-in-law's remarks had irritated her also, and she was ready to charge Mr. Erskine with entering into a conspiracy with Mrs. Everett: which no one would have supposed to be likely. She was more accustomed than most people are to act upon the impulse of the moment, and that night she wrote upon it,—asking Mr. Erskine what right she had ever given him to take upon himself the supervision of her acquaintance? and begging that if she had ever done so, he would bring her to book by reminding her of the occasion. She spoke in terms of warm commendation of her friends the Stanleys (for whom she did not care at

all), and begged, finally, that she might never again be troubled by such officious care. Woman fashion, she poured forth her wrath upon the man who she knew would bear it. To be lectured for flirtation was more than she could endure; and she especially hardened her heart with the thought—"If I had compromised myself for him, he would not have been so tender-hearted, perhaps." I know not how far Mr. Erskine's magnanimity and self-denial went, but perhaps that last reflection of Constance's was not altogether wrong.

The next morning was one which Constance long remembered. She was in bed when her maid took the letters for the post, and idly watched her as she left the room with them in her hand. It was a beautiful sunshiny morning, and that winter-day seemed to be aping summer, but to Constance it was a sorry make-believe; she would colour all around her by whatever feeling she was possessed of for the time being, and she was just then very melancholy. In truth, the prospect of many years of nominal marriage, and of her lonely, childless life, was enough to sadden one so young and so impulsive.

She was talking to her mother-in-law after breakfast, kneeling opposite to her with her arms resting on the table, having been arranging flowers that were just brought in from the greenhouse; and now she had been telling Mrs. Everett, whom she had

quite softened by her pretty winning ways, that she had written to Southampton to say that she was coming: if it were but for the chance of Frank's knowing her, she would go. She had given up a projected visit to the Stanleys, and appeared, as she in truth felt, indifferent about it.

They were still talking on, Mrs. Everett predicting her son's recovery and how far more devoted he would be to his wife henceforth, and Constance listlessly hearing her, when Edgar came quickly in with a letter in his hand, Emmy, who was behind him, white and trembling, nearly crying. He seemed uncertain what to do first, or whom to address first,—he had not expected to find Constance there. The old woman looked round as he entered, and started.

“Edgar, speak, my dear, it's not—not——” she said, in a sharp quivering voice.

Constance knew that it was: she knelt there without moving, and looked fixedly at Edgar and Emmy. Some instinct told her, and she did not start as she heard Edgar say, taking his mother's hand, “It's Frank, poor fellow!” When Emmy came to her, she got up, walked stupidly to the sofa, and sat down. It was a deliverance; but it had come so quickly, and answered so fearfully soon to her thoughts, that it stunned her. She leant her head upon her hand, and felt a nervous tendency to laugh; she hated herself, and would have given

her right hand or her right eye to have shed tears. It was horrible suffering, only to feel remorse at not grieving. Soon tears came: it is difficult to say why, but she wept heartily and sincerely.

That was a long day of whispering, talking, and settling. They talked low, as if they were paying the dead some respect; and as if animated conversation would disturb him. Constance was in her room all day; Mr. and Mrs. Everett, too, were generally up-stairs; the girls, William, and the two Edgars, fidgeted about the house. Frank had died suddenly in a fit, just when they fancied that he was recovering. The funeral was to take place at Ilderton, and there were many things to arrange. The girls and Louisa were very busy, and immediately began a correspondence with shopkeepers about mourning.

The first thing which aroused Mrs. Everett was their having taken too much upon themselves without consulting her; and then, when appealed to, she wanted to know if "they could not leave her quiet for only one day, the first day she knew her boy was dead."

Mr. Everett walked restlessly about the house, and ended by going to Constance's room; he took hold of her hand and sat silently for a little while, then went away, and presently came back again. He knew what Constance felt, and what the blow

was to her : the two could sympathize best together. Emmy, too, who had been grown up for six months, and whose knowledge of the world was proportionately large, expended a great deal of feeling upon Constance, and wondered if she would ever be like her former self again. In spite of some very cynical opinions which she entertained respecting men and society (for Emmy did not wish to be behind-hand in knowledge of the world), her inmost creed was sentimental, and she was as ready as the rest of womankind to give away her heart. She should always be in love with her husband, always—she knew that—if he were Sir Hugh.

Edgar was the eldest son now : not that he rejoiced over it, poor fellow ; he would have said that he was sorry, only he did not know how ; but Constance, who always remembered to say the right thing at the right moment, said so for him. In a few days the funeral took place, and the handsome first-born, whom father and mother had so delighted in, was resting in the family burial-place.

Mrs. Francis Everett's mourning was a double one, for two days afterwards her aunt died ; and the whole of her fortune, which was a large one, fell to Constance. And that young, winning woman was saved—saved from great misery, most likely—by her weak, worthless husband's death. How would she have borne her fate for many more years ? How

would she not have altered? In a few more years Constance must have been very different: a light defiant worldliness would have crept over her; she could not have stood alone: morally, I mean. She would not have mourned or grieved openly; but the solitude of her life would have left strong tokens in the change of her whole being.

CHAPTER IX.

It was summer at Grainthorpe; the second summer from that in which Georgy Sandon had first seen Mr. Erskine, and in a short time Captain Anstruther would probably return. There was no outward change at Grainthorpe. Georgy's life had passed, a bit of gray blotting-paper might best tell how. Aunt Jane was older and sharper, more busy and more exacting than ever. Uncle Robert's temper, too, had been somewhat tried by losses in his business; he was now very absolute and tyrannical, very irritable, and easily offended.

The children's education must advance; Miss Robson was expensive; so Georgy was called upon to tutor them, under her aunt's supervision and direction.

Such was her outer life: and all this time had been very long in passing. One idea possessed her inwardly; it grew upon her daily, and she existed only in the recollection of James Erskine, who had been so kind to her. Although their gaieties were very limited—for the little girls not being grown

up, Aunt Jane had religious objections to a profitless going out—still Georgy had contrived sometimes to meet Mr. Erskine; for when any one is steadily resolved to meet another, it is astonishing how much may be done even under difficulties. She met with many rebuffs from Aunt Jane, and as a consequence, from her uncle also; who, being always busy, took his opinion on all family matters from his wife.

Georgy's going out only took place when there was a chance of meeting Mr. Erskine or his mother. On the latter, she bestowed a half-vicarious, half-real affection: she would always have liked her, but the extent of that liking was given somewhat for sake's sake. So in the ensuing years she sometimes saw them; and seeing no one else, there was but little possibility that her one deep impression should be effaced.

Often when some one, a stranger to her world and to her people, said, "What do you think I heard to-day? Who do you think I met?" and she knew that her face ought to express interest for a moment, the same senseless hope, the same groundless expectation arose; and though she felt that it was impossible, she hoped for a moment to hear of the only thing that interested her, and fancied that they might pronounce the only name she cared to hear.

There were times of remorse when she thought of Stephen Anstruther; times when she would not

marry him, and wrote in her imagination long letters : letters which told him all ; letters which must have been good, if an expenditure of misery and tears were to go for anything ; and such, she was sure, as must make him forgive all. But—he never understood anything ; and to put pen to paper and begin to write—oh ! it would have been easier to have joined in olden days a party of those German fanatics we read of, who paraded the streets of towns denuded of all their garments. Then she *would* marry : she would not give up her one way of escape from Grainthorpe ; and she laid to her heart each laughing bit of matrimonial scepticism which Mrs. Everett sometimes preached, all Mrs. Lewis's philosophy, and the cheerful, solid good sense with which her friend Jessie Macbean and her sisters regarded the subject. All true enough in a way, no doubt ; but her disposition was not precisely the same as any of theirs, and it might have been a risk to take their creed to herself. She had grown up in great dread of her uncle ; and the idea of facing his anger and refusing Captain Anstruther seemed half an impossibility.

On the understanding of his marriage, a great part of the Captain's little fortune had been embarked in those inexplicable speculations wherein Georgy's money lay. The money prospects were gloomy now, and the impending loss to Stephen was a terrible vexation to Mr. Sandon. If Georgy had refused to

fulfil her engagement when Stephen was already a loser, Uncle Robert's first impulse would have been (had he lived in ancient times) to sentence her to a summary imprisonment. Aunt Jane disliked her niece, who naturally reciprocated the feeling. Georgy knew that she seemed cold and distant to her uncle; she knew, too, that she had disappointed him. He had wished her to grow up a tall, talkative girl, saying no matter what and singing no matter how, only songs with plenty of verses in them. She felt that she should have been differently constituted, and that her nature was surely a fault in her.

There lay one more feeling in her heart, utterly unexpressed, and never distinctly recognised by herself: it was that her only real approach to James Erskine would be when she was married. She did not think that thought, but there lay the consciousness of it under her very thoughts: Macbeth had some such consciousness, perhaps, of *how* his desire might be accomplished, before he wished for its fulfilment.

Such flashes of what may be cross many a one; and sometimes circumstances and temptations develope them into active realities: and then those who have enacted them are criminal above the rest of their fellow-creatures! Are they not? Are guilt and innocence always divided by one strongly-defined line of demarcation? There are some who, when

they hear of crimes, say in their hearts, "But for the grace of God, there goes John Bradley." Or, if they be so innocent that no conscious understanding of that sin and misery is possessed by them, then that charity which is God's own gift gives them the spirit of sympathy and pity. And there are some who, when they hear of crimes, say only that they are thankful not to be as others. These, too, must be all innocent, or fenced round by that happy obtuseness, given either by disposition or by a limited circle of events.

Perhaps Georgy was not guilty above others: perhaps she would have shrunk from the faintest fulfilment of that underthought of hers: but it was there. Happiness in this world meant but one thing for her, and that was the only way in which it would ever be gained. You had better give up the thought of happiness; you will not find it, any more than others have done, here. If you do not leave the strife, then your deep passionate nature will know a fearful struggle, and you will find not happiness, but misery above that of others.

CHAPTER X.

TIME had brought an unpleasant change to Mrs. Erskine and her son, for they were both considerably poorer than formerly. Mrs. Erskine's eldest son had engaged himself, and persuaded his mother to involve herself, in railroad speculations, which had ended by causing them a considerable loss; and before this had happened, James, too, had engaged himself for his mother, and in the desire to help the other two, had suffered along with them. He was working very hard now, and Mrs. Erskine was about to sell Monklands. If it were possible that with her one day could better others' love, then she loved James better than before, and most deeply did she lament the loss which his kind-heartedness had brought upon him.

One morning Aunt Jane and her niece, who were for a few days in the neighbourhood, performed the periodical observance of a morning call at Millthorpe Grange; and after a good deal of conversation had passed, and luncheon was ended, Mrs. Lewis and

Georgy walked into the garden, leaving Aunt Jane still talking in the drawing-room.

"Georgy, you look as sober as if you had the world upon your shoulders, or were, at the least, engaged to be married."

Georgy burst out, "Well! so I am—to Captain Anstruther—do you know him?"

"But, my dear girl, this must have been for ever so long; how shabby of you not to tell me!"

Georgy's face told so much that Mrs. Lewis said, gravely, "Tell me now, dear."

"For ever so long, as you say; for nearly three years. I never could bring myself to make formal mention of it; and yet that was very foolish of me: I had better have declared it at once."

"I am glad to hear this, Georgy; you will really have a comfortable home, I hope; and you will do very well, when it is once over, though you perhaps do not think so now."

"That is easier to preach than to feel," said Georgy, laughing nervously. "I wish! oh! I wish that I had married three years ago; but I cannot say that I wish to do so now."

Mrs. Lewis did not preach or moralize, but she felt kindly towards Georgy, and set herself quietly to demonstrate that marriage was the best thing for her.

"What do you mean to do, my dear? You are

more inclined to break stones on the road, perhaps; but as your uncle would not permit that, you must break with him first. You do not suppose that he would countenance your going out as a governess; which to you would be the meaning of breaking stones on the road: what shall you do? Living at Grainthorpe cannot be pleasant."

"Mrs. Lewis, I cannot dispute your wisdom, but I have no vocation for matrimony: I wish I had been married long ago."

"You are right there; a woman should be married before she knows good from evil: what is distasteful at eighteen is still harder to swallow a few years later," she answered, sarcastically.

"But I would not speak so of Captain Anstruther, whom I have such real regard for, only——"

"I understand you perfectly," said Mrs. Lewis, who thought that as Georgy would certainly marry Captain Anstruther, it was wrong to speak disparagingly of him. "I am only speaking generally. I remember meeting Captain Anstruther; I thought him very, very amiable: he certainly looked it."

"Very," echoed Georgy; glad to find a "very" she could conscientiously join in.

This cool classification of husbands under the head of necessary evils, rather grated against her; for, like many of us, she disliked that the ideas which

she often indulged in should be reduced to a form of words.

"Georgy," said Mrs. Lewis again, when their colloquy was ended, "you should make up your mind, and not get frightened—no one can judge for another, but I think that you will be happier when married."

And so their talk was over; and it had exactly the contrary effect upon Georgy from that which was intended.

The idea of "making up her mind" frightened her, and she began to feel that it was impossible: even that mournful alternative of remaining at Grainthorpe was preferable.

She had often contemplated marriage—marriage at any price, as a deliverance from Grainthorpe, but now she shrank from the possibility of the realization of any such imaginings. Then she began to consider "Why should she throw up the battle of life, and say inwardly that no good thing could befall her? She would not marry Stephen, and must say so without delay"—and for some days she nerved herself for an outbreak. "If they were very angry, well—she would go to her great aunt and live there; and if she were penniless, well—teach music." And so she played nearly a whole day, and began a dream of musical life amongst artists (if only a music-mistress could ever realize it). She

would do great things — and sometimes see Mr. Erskine.

Jessie Macbean bantered Mr. Sandon when she saw him, upon his niece's altered appearance—"she was evidently weary of waiting!" Jessie never meant to offend anybody, but generally gave utterance to whatever speech came uppermost. Georgy had never said that she was engaged; but from some words of Mr. Sandon's, Jessie was quite sure of it. She patronized Georgy, whom she thought a good, quiet little soul, not formed for society (in that, perhaps, she was right), and, on the whole, a little peculiar. This was the summary she gave of Georgy, but liked her nevertheless, and protected her. Georgy was very much in love with Stephen, that Jessie saw with half an eye; and they were two sober people, just suited to each other. Why, she had waited for three years, and never flirted with one of the Eastham officers! She deserved a good character for constancy; indeed, her conduct altogether edified Jessie, who said so to Captain Walters, with a coy insinuation that she should not be equal to such a course. Jessie said this while she was resting after a polka, and contemplating a galop. What would Jessie do in any world where people do not polk?

CHAPTER XL.

"ANSTRUTHER will return this autumn, you know," Uncle Robert had said at breakfast; and all that day Georgy watched for her uncle. A little before dinner she saw him walking in the garden, and went at once to meet him.

"Uncle Robert."

"Well!"

"When do you think Stephen Anstruther will be at home?"

"What a question! how can I tell? All women will ask those questions: am I one of the Admiralty? His three years will soon be out, so you had better write to the Admiralty to say how much you want him, that he may return to a day. Are you in such a hurry?"

"Not at all — anything but that," she replied, abruptly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," she said, feeling very nervous, "I mean, that I am not at all in a hurry for his arrival."

"What fancy have you taken now?"

"I do not want to marry Stephen Anstruther. I was very young when I was engaged, and I did not know my own mind: I don't want to marry him, now."

"Georgy," Mr. Sandon said, very sternly, "don't talk such nonsense or you will make me angry. What do you mean? You cannot break your engagement."

"Why not?" (resolutely).

"Why not? why not? why not? the d—! Jane is right, and you have always been allowed far too much liberty."

"Why cannot I break my engagement? Is it better to marry, hating it all the time?"

"Don't be romantic, if you please. How the deuce should you hate marrying Stephen? What is there about him to hate?"

"Nothing," she answered, with a half smile; for the ice once broken, her courage began to rise.

"You must marry; it would be wrong not, Georgy; so be reasonable, and tell me what you really mean."

He was quiet now, and they took a turn on the walk in silence.

"The long and short of this, Georgy, is, that some one has begun to make love to you: when and where, I cannot conceive. Be open, and tell me all about it."

"I have nothing to tell: no one ever made love to me but Stephen."

"You mean to tell me that?"

"Yes," she replied, looking him in the face, but crimsoning as she said so. It was a rash movement: her colour brought forth the rather natural retort.

"Then *you* have fallen in love."

That stirred her: "You have no right to say such a thing," she said, sternly. "No right: do you hear me? Don't say it again. I will not marry Stephen Anstruther: I don't care for him, and I won't: that is all I have to say."

She was as savage as a desperate woman could be. Those chance words respecting some other love, had stirred the one chord which would have made her defy anything. Her uncle had never seen her in a rage before. She was nervously tearing to pieces the topmost roses on a little tree.

"Are you mad?"

"No; I am not. Is it mad to say I won't marry a man I don't care for? Would it not be much more mad to do it?"

"Do you like no one better?"

"A great many people: I have seen a great many people, whom I would rather marry. Shall I tell them all over?" she continued, in a deliberate mocking tone.

"Stephen's money is involved in our concerns;

and it was all on your account." Her uncle was momentarily quieted by her outbreak.

"I am very sorry; but I did not make him do it."

"You are a true woman; you will talk of liking or not liking by the hour, and then turn a deaf ear when you are told what is honourable or dishonourable."

"I know what is honourable or dishonourable, too," she retorted; her face contracting at the thought of some inward consciousness, with which her uncle's words had no connection.

"You *shall* marry Stephen, or I'll turn you out of the house!" Mr. Sandon was at a loss for any other argument.

"Very well. I won't wait to be turned out: I'll go."

"Where?"

"Anywhere, anywhere. What do you want? Shall I go now?" and she took him aback, as she stood there biting her lips, her eyes wild with anger and excitement.

"Are you coming in to get ready for dinner?" called out Aunt Jane from the window.

It was a relief to them both, and they walked silently into the house. He opened the door, and saw her in before him, as if he half expected to see her execute her offer of going at that moment.

For a few minutes Georgy sat in her own room,

before she went to dinner; she was perplexed, and half-beside herself. This is often the case with habitually gentle people, who, when once aroused, have less control over themselves, and are less measured in their wrath, than those who are often angry, and who so acquire a mean in their very desperation. All the repressed thoughts of years had arisen suddenly, and she could not understand just then how she had borne this life so long. The first beginning was made, and nothing now seemed so dreadful to her. She was ready in the drawing-room before either of the other two, for Uncle Robert was still in his dressing-room declaiming vehemently to his wife.

For several days there was warfare at Grainthorpe, which was resolutely kept up, chiefly through the agency of Aunt Jane. Had it not been for her, Georgy and her uncle would have understood each other, at length. Had you in the course of conversation asked Mr. Sandon whether he wished to force anybody to marry against their will, he would certainly have been as shocked as if cannibalism had been imputed to him. But his wife—who knew him, and knew the right moment for urging him to opposition, and had often misrepresented Georgy's words and deeds—did not fail to do so now. If Georgy had first made a confidant of Aunt Jane, and had rendered her of some importance in the matter, she

would have been more amiably disposed; but now she was thoroughly hostile to her niece. The latter seemed suddenly to have lost all fear of her aunt, and met her with utter indifference, and a grave, plausible sarcasm which rather kept her at a distance; for Mrs. Sandon was a coward at heart, and would behave better to any one who did not fear her. She had one way, however, of retaliating; for she could irritate her husband, and prevent his viewing Georgy fairly: against whom, now, she was particularly ardent on the charge of hypocrisy, which she imputed to her in consequence of her sudden change of conduct.

There was another stormy interview two days afterwards. Georgy said that she would write to Stephen. "If you dare!" said Mr. Sandon. "You have nothing: almost nothing; and you shall not stay here." His wife had been at work, and had persuaded him of the efficacy of that threat.

"I will go to my aunt's, and teach music, and shall trouble no one."

This threat enraged him, and he swore and scolded: each day made him more bitter. Georgy became at last very silent.

"I will not, and you cannot make me," was all the answer which he received when he urged her marriage.

Again he burst out, "Jane is right—you know you're in love with somebody else."

"Leave me alone," she said, quite under her breath; "leave me alone; you had better. Your wife told you to say that."

"Well, and if she did, she thinks it true, perhaps: cannot you prove at once that she is wrong?"

"I have no after-thought. I am not bettering myself by refusing; but I cannot marry Stephen," she said sadly, in a low tone, and then went quietly towards her room.

He followed her, and made a show of locking the door; then unlocked it, half-ashamed of his blustering, and stood for a moment with his hand upon the lock of the half-opened door. He wanted to say something conciliatory, but Georgy gave him no opportunity: she did not perceive his intention, and so without more words he went down-stairs.

They had dined early, as they often did in summer, and that afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Sandon were going to visit a friend beyond Eastham. Georgy sat a long time silent; she had heard them drive away, and still sat pondering and watching the landscape, without perceiving anything. She was glad that he had said it—glad that he had left her without a conciliatory word. Now she was justified, in her own mind, and she would go.

She laid all her things in order; putting them as

she wished them to be found by her aunt. Then she sat down and wrote to her uncle, telling him that "she had gone to her aunt's; that she would not stay at Grainthorpe, since her refusal to marry Stephen had brought matters to such a pass; and he would surely feel that it was better that she should not." Some awkward phrase, expressing that she was not forgetful of his past kindness, rose to her thoughts; but it would have looked like a misplaced mockery there, and she could not write it. If he had not known it before, how could she say it then? This was the crowning-piece to their mutual misunderstanding. Her anger helped her through quickly with the note, and then suddenly her last words recurred to her. "No after-thought; I have none," she thought proudly; "I will love no one." Yes; and she would prove it to herself. There lay a note amongst some little relics of her mother's, in an old desk: it was a note from Mr. Erskine concerning some music, which Mrs. Lewis wished to borrow from her. It was but a short note, but it was to her more life-like, and brought back livelier recollections, than those remains of one whom she could scarcely remember.

She looked at the note wistfully, and then touched it with her lips, making believe as if a chance movement induced her to raise her hand. She was alone, and still she made believe, for it seemed as if the

chairs and tables had eyes to see her with, and she was keeping up appearances with herself. She burnt the note, and then she saw the envelope lying by itself: it was all that remained, and (the fool) she kept that; and only treasured it the more, I believe, because the rest was gone through her own magnanimous deed.

The children startled her by calling her to tea: she went mechanically, and began cutting bread and butter for them, wondering meantime how she was to go. The idea of wandering about the world without even one gown to change, is not agreeable to a woman, however pre-occupied she may be. Willie Anderson, she knew, would soon be passing with his post-cart, and she decided that he should take something for her. She bade Poppy run down to tell him to wait when he came, and then began to hasten tea over as much as possible. The children were left very quiet: one with a liberal donation of string, one with a book of hers, and Poppy with a piece of red silk and some faded artificial flowers.

"Oh! Georgy, you are very generous to us to-night," said Poppy.

"I have so much to be generous with, dear," she said, mournfully.

"A great deal: have you anything more to give us?" answered Poppy, literally.

"And if you will first be my horse, I'll be very good indeed."

"No, I am busy, and you must stay quietly here," said she, declining Poppy's gracious offer.

"You always say you are busy when papa has been scolding you; and what do you want Willie to wait for?"

"Never mind, dear."

"Will you come back soon and go into the garden?"

"Perhaps."

And so she got away, back to her room again. A small box was packed, and I regret to say no less than three dresses were crushed into it, besides numberless other things. Her bonnet was on, and she was counting up the contents of her purse and calculating the price of the train, when Bessy the housemaid appeared.

"Willie canna be fashed to wait long: what do ye want wi' him, Miss Georgina?"

"To take this little box to the station."

"What for? and where are ye off to wi' your best bonnet on?"

"Oh! Bessy, don't trouble me now: it need not concern you in the least."

"Ye've been gettin' your scolds from the master or the mistress, I guess."

Georgy stood very irresolute: was she to im-

plore Bessy's connivance—give her something—own to “gettin’ her scolds,” or what?

“What’s come to ye, Miss Georgina? you’ve been crying.”

“I am going to my other aunt’s; but really, Bessy, you need not know anything about it.”

Bessy would, however.

“Not to Miss Sparrow’s?”

“Yes, to Miss Sparrow’s.”

“Eh! but she’s a’ London,” Bessy chanted rather than said, in her astonishment.

“Yes, she *is* there, and I am going to see her, at least for a while. I won’t be denied, Bessy; I must take this box down myself, for I don’t want to get you into trouble, and the less you ask about it the better.”

“I am not afraid of what nobody says to me,” said Bessy, disdainfully. She was as free-spoken as the raw, unsophisticated, north country servants always are; for this was her first place, and she hated the mistress and liked Georgy.

“But ye’ll be coming back, I suppose: just tell me about it.”

“I don’t know, I am sure. I am going straight to my aunt’s; I can tell nothing else.”

“Well, I’ll not be saying anything; ye know best, Miss Georgy. Eh! but the mistress, she *is* hard upon ye: she’s been fighting you, I know.”

"Yes, she has; but Bessy, let me go, that's a good woman."

"Well, come along, never mind what they say to me: *you* can't carry the box, Miss Georgy."

There was a sulky, rude kindness about Bessy that made it difficult to offer her money, so Georgy only shook hands with her, and thanked her. Bessy made over the box to Willie, with orders to take it and Miss Sandon to the station.

"You must let me know if you get into trouble about me, Bessy," said she.

"The mistress had better not be too sharp with me; the situation does not please me over well, and I'm not over anxious to stop: she'll not get another quickly, to do all as I have done."


"Good-bye, Bessy."

"Good-bye, Miss Georgina, and I'll maybe let you know if me and the mistress has any disagreement." Bessy stood defiantly at the door till Georgy was out of sight, and then walked stolidly back to her work, rather pleased at this opportunity of contradicting the mistress. Willie Anderson was not conversible, or curious; he asked no questions, but merely made one or two local observations as they drove along. He deposited Georgy at the station, and before the sun had set, she was on her road to London.

CHAPTER XII.

A LONG, strange night she passed, being far too excited to sleep, and a vivid recollection of every thing which had ever happened to her passing through her brain. How had she lived so long at Grainthorpe? that was the puzzle to her now. How she had not gone—gone no matter how, and why, long ago—she could not understand. It appeared to be another self that had lived so long at Grainthorpe. Gradually the grey morning began to appear, and her sleepy companions to arouse themselves, as the journey's end approached. Her only distinct idea was, that this was London: London, where, if she did not believe the streets were paved with gold, she fancied that all intellectual life and riches were to be found.

She had never been in London since she was a child; and now, as she watched that dark, smoky mass, and could see but a small part of that region of buildings, her heart beat quicker: she knew that she should soon be there, "in amongst the throngs of men;" there, in the midst of that life-giving strife



and tumult, to be amongst which only would make her a participator therein. What a world of enthusiasm is sometimes poured forth upon that dark, dense city, and what strange contrasts it contains! How the fulness of its life, and the depth of its sufferings appear as foils one to the other in their intensity.

She nearly lost her luggage at the station, for she was bewildered by the noise and bustle, and very glad to find a temporary refuge at the Station Hotel. Here she counted the hours until she thought that she might set out to her aunt's. She did not want rest, but was so excited and confused, that she liked to sit idly and reflect, and dreaded the occupation of keeping up a conversation. She did not fear a rebuff, for she felt confident that the kind-hearted old lady would receive her well.

She left her things at the hotel; for there was a sort of awkwardness in arriving with them and asking to be admitted, and she preferred leaving them to be sent for afterwards. It was well she did so, for, on arriving at — Street, Miss Sparrow was not there. Since her favourite niece's departure, whom she liked to be near, she had removed to another house. Georgy felt angry at her neglect of foresight: she might have gone to her aunt's own house first; she knew that this was not her permanent residence, and she need not be surprised. Her little stock of money was getting low, and anxious to be

economical, she dismissed the cab, and walked on to — Place.

The bustle of the street pleased her—and there was a great sense of enjoyment in her new-found freedom. Then, too, she somehow identified this great town with the one being whom she loved best in the world. All here had something of him in it. Something: yes, it was a wide proprietorship which she assigned to one man; for all here seemed to belong to him. She was free now, and all her life long might live upon that dream, if she would.

- The kind words of Mrs. Erskine were still ringing in her ears—she had built unconsciously upon them for months. She expected nothing actually, but Mrs. Erskine had bid her so heartily come and see her, that she meant in all simplicity to do so: bid her apply to her if she wanted anything; and so it was to her that she meant to go when she needed help and advice.

Georgy was tired with walking when she reached her aunt's house; but Miss Sparrow was not there: "No, this was Mrs. Barker's." Georgy was thunderstruck. "But this is not Mrs. Barker's own house?"

"No, she leaves in a fortnight again: I'll ask if she knows Miss Sparrow."

The civil maid asked, and a civil lady appeared, who did know Miss Sparrow. Miss Sparrow was at Brighton, and her house was let in the meantime

Mrs. Barker wrote down her address for Georgy, and then vaguely asked if she could be of any further use to her. But Georgy wanted nothing; she was going to see a friend who lived very near, and then should go on to Brighton. Yes, she thought, as she left the house, she must go to Brighton immediately; but first a pleasant visit was to be paid—she would see Mrs. Erskine, and from her she was very sure to have advice and sympathy. She knew her road now, and passed through the square where she had often been as a child: the little plants, not so tall as herself then, were now respectable shrubs; the church with florid architecture, which she had watched building from the nursery windows, was finished, and houses built in front of it, so that she could only see the steeple. She smiled to herself when she reached Mrs. Erskine's house; she had no misgivings as to the reception which she would find, and her only cause of fear was soon removed, for Mrs. Erskine was at home.

She was left waiting nearly ten minutes in the pretty, luxurious, little drawing-room—then Mrs. Erskine appeared, saying that she was very tired, and busy: she had just come to town, and, in truth, was pre-occupied by her daughter's illness, money matters, and a whole train of annoyances, of which Georgy knew nothing.

"So you are come to town! How pleased you

must be: your aunt is such a kind, gentle creature, it must be pleasant to stay with her."

"Yes; I think she will be very kind."

"You must come and see me again; to-day I am very busy and tired. I only got back yesterday night from poor Julia's—she is far from well, and they are taking her to Edinburgh."

"I am very sorry, dear Mrs. Erskine."

"Everybody has their miseries, my dear; it is of no use troubling others with them, so I will not bore you."

"I think I must go to Brighton" (rather hesitatingly): but Mrs. Erskine had not paid attention.

"Oh! Brighton; I thought you were going to stay here; but Brighton will be very pleasant in this fine weather; I only wish that poor Julia ——" Her sentence was broken off by the entrance of visitors: two talkative ladies, one young and one middle-aged, intimate friends of Mrs. Erskine's for they talked over Julia and her case; and then—James Erskine came in. He looked worn and tired; greeted the ladies, and then Miss Sandon.

"Oh! Miss Sandon, it is quite a pleasant surprise to see you: I did not know that you were coming to London."

He shook hands; but she was in a corner by Mrs. Erskine, and his natural place was on the other side of the room. The elder lady told some story; and, being opposite to Georgy, courteously recognised

her presence, addressing it partly to her: but it was a story, the point of which hung on the knowledge of Charles Seymour, and his peculiar idiosyncrasies. Georgy did not know him, and felt the separation from them all which that implied. Not to know Charles Seymour, was there to be "out of humanity's reach;" for, evidently, the lady no more expected her to be ignorant of who he was, than of who was reigning in France at that time. The conversation continued in the same unintelligible frame to Georgy for a few moments, and then the ladies rose to go. They were relations, probably, for Mr. Erskine called the young lady Kate, and she spoke to him as James. Her mantle caught in the screen, just as they were going; and he caught hold of her shoulder just in time to prevent the ruin of the whole garment.

"Kate is too bad," said her mother: "she is very extravagant, and takes no care of her things when she has got them."

"One must have clothes in London," pleaded Kate.

"Of course," answered James, confidentially: "if they throw this torn mantle in your teeth, get another one to assert yourself."

"There, do you hear what James says, mamma?"

"What? now we must go, Kate," and James helped to replace the torn trimming on the mantle; but she never looked at him, for the mantle and its safety was uppermost in her thoughts.

"Is Mrs. Sandon in London?" asked James, in an absent way; and then, as the ladies descended the staircase, he crossed to the table, took possession of a newspaper, at which he had evidently before been aiming, and slipped out of the room.

"James is terribly busy just now."

"Perhaps you are too, Mrs. Erskine?"

"Well, my dear, I will not ask you to stay to-day; I am so tired, and am not fit for anything."

She had just laughed heartily, and taken a keen interest in Charles Seymour. "You must mind and come another day, and tell me all about yourself. They are well at Grainthorpe, I hope?"

"Quite well."

"I am glad to hear it," said she, leaning back, and relapsing into silence.

Georgy rose to go; she felt so shy, that to say good-bye seemed difficult. "What did you say about Brighton? You will come and see me, you know, when you return." She was evidently bored.


"Good-bye," murmured Georgy.

"Good-bye, dear; mind you ——" and, at a letter which the servant handed to her, she exclaimed, "Oh! there is an answer;" and forgot about Brighton till Georgy was gone, and then thought, "Oh! of course she will come again before she goes: I should like to see her, poor child;" and presently all recollections of her visit vanished from Mrs. Erskine's mind.

Georgy left the house: she had never before known what disappointment was. She had never known before how she had hung her whole existence on the hope of a few kind words. She never knew till then how weak and helpless she was. She had thought that she could fight her way alone; and now it seemed as if only the hope of seeing Mrs. Erskine and her son had brought her away from Grainthorpe.


She walked on through the square, and then back again very quickly, for she felt that she had need of something to quiet her; then she went on again a long way, and reached the park, near Kensington Gardens: she went in there and sat down. Her sense of degradation was overpowering.

What had she gone to Mrs. Erskine's for? She was only an acquaintance: they had received her as such; and what more had she to expect? Why had she built, like a child, upon a few good-natured, well-meant words? Oh! she had built so trustingly and so literally! She had not presumed, she knew—but she had clung too confidently to a few words. There was only one hope in the world that warmed her heart, and that was gone. None can tell, until some day like that which she was passing now, how much hope has mingled with even the most irrational love, whilst they sophistically make out to themselves that no such hope exists.



Georgy sat still for a long time. More than two hours had she been there before she roused herself, and remembered that she could not sit so longer : it was a cold summer's day, and the east wind parched and chilled her. She asked herself again why she was unhappy ? It seemed that she had just been cast off from home and hope ; and yet—she had expected nothing. She asked the question stupidly now, and with a sort of bewilderment at herself. She had come all this way to see him, but had not known it before. Her misery was so great that there must be some relief. This tide of shame and disappointment was more than could be borne. She had suffered almost to the full extent of which her nature was capable of enduring.

She was very tired and hungry, and an odd vision was passing through her brain, of all sorts of cool, quiet resting-places, where she might lie down and sleep, and never wake. She went out of the park, and walked on to the next pastry-cook's which she could find ; but she was not hungry when she reached it, and only asked for a glass of water. She took out her purse, but the woman said she wanted no payment for the water : the lady was welcome to take a rest if she pleased ; but she looked so hard at her, that Georgy did not like to sit there to be stared at, and went away. She must go to Brighton that evening, for she should not have money to stay



at the inn all night, she feared; and as she walked slowly on, she looked in her pocket for the address of her aunt at Brighton. It was not there! She had forgotten it!

People who have never been forced to travel alone, are often at first very careless: by way of showing their coolness, perhaps; or else very fidgety. Georgy was of the first class, and trusted too implicitly to chance in all her arrangements. She had taken out her handkerchief several times, and the direction might be lying on Mrs. Erskine's carpet, might have been lost in the park, or left at the pastry-cook's: she went back to the last-named place—but could not find it—she must return to Mrs. Barker's then, to ask for it again; and, in spite of her light purse, she must take a cab, for she was **dull** and stupid with fatigue. One or two people stared at her as they passed, which very much disconcerted her; and a nervous fever seized her, lest she should meet some one whom she knew at Eastham. If she had seen her own face, however, she need not have been astonished; it was quite colourless, and her lips were blue rather than pale. Just as she saw a cab, and beckoned to it, a hand was laid upon her shoulder; she started violently forward, but the hand still held her; she fancied that it was her uncle, or a policeman, and turned round frightened. It was only Mr. Erskine.

"Miss Sandon, for Heaven's sake, what is the matter with you? Where are you going? What has happened?"

"Let me go! I want nothing."

"Miss Sandon, you had better come home to my mother's."

"Let me go! I don't want you," she said, pushing him back, and then leant against the railings.

"Where shall I take you? Cannot I be of some use? Where are you going?"

"I don't know," she answered, still drawing back, and clinging to the rails for support. The cab was there, but she did not recollect who had called it.

"Pray, get in."

"I am going back to the hotel, and then to Brighton," turning round as if she meant to walk on; but she trembled so that she could hardly stand.

"My dear Miss Sandon, you had better come with me, and tell me what is the matter when you are quieter."

She looked up at him with a guilty, frightened face; everything was growing strange to her: she only remembered that he had forgotten her, and that she had resolved never to throw herself in his way again. He knew, too, that she loved him—everybody must know it. They did at Grainthorpe, surely; and she had disgraced herself for ever. He knew how glad she had been at the thought of

seeing him again, and was angry with her for it. The only distinct consciousness that she possessed was, that he knew of her love for him: her guilty conscience told her this, as clearly as a murderer is persuaded that all chance passers by are scanning him curiously. She bent down her head, and said, "I don't want you: I am going my own way. I can take care of myself, thank you; let me go," and she started away from him.

He took hold of her arm, so that she could not get loose. "Get in directly, Miss Sandon; we shall have a crowd round us if you don't take care. For Heaven's sake get in, and you shall go wherever you like: get in quickly."

Georgy obeyed, and then her tears burst forth. She very seldom cried; but, even as a child thought it a degradation to cry before company; now she was horrified beyond measure at her outburst. She leant back, hid her face, and every now and then sobbed, not loudly, but so convulsively that she seemed half torn to pieces in her efforts to restrain herself. Mr. Erskine looked at her dismayed for a minute, and then fairly put his arm round her, and said, imploringly, "Miss Sandon, Georgy, be quiet: I will take care of you. Why did you go away so quickly this morning? Why didn't you stay with us? I will take care of you."

Georgy was quiet, and presently he found that

she had fainted. There was some reason for it. After days of greater excitement than she had ever before known, she had travelled all night in a fever of her own raising. She had been too restless to eat breakfast, and then had wandered about nearly all day. She never again thought that she should see James Erskine, and now he was here, and had bidden her come home with him.

CHAPTER XIII.

GEORGY was soon herself again in Mrs. Erskine's little drawing-room. Mr. Erskine was still there, and a maid, who took off her bonnet and brought her some wine.

"Will you rest now?" he said.

"No; I am going: it is so late."

"Where?"

"To Brighton."

"Brighton in general, or some particular place?" he answered, smiling.

"I will tell you;" and then, on making a slight movement, she caught sight of her face in the glass, and laughed faintly.

"Oh! what a figure I am: no wonder people stared at me."

"It is no wonder. Do not you think me justified in stopping you, Miss Sandon, and taking you anywhere, even to the police-office?"

"I don't know," she said, still surveying herself in astonishment.

"You are much paler than any sheet, and there is nothing alive about you but your eyes."

"I expected to find my aunt in London, and she is at Brighton. I must go to her; but I have lost her direction;" Georgy went on, regardless of his remarks.

"But doesn't she expect you?"

"No; I left Grainthorpe last night: she doesn't know about it."

"Who does?"

"Nobody."

"Miss Sandon, then you mean —— you —— ran away."

"Yes, Mr. Erskine," she answered, rather amused at his curiosity. His quiet manner had calmed her, and her position seemed more natural.

"Why did you not come here, then? my mother would have taken care of you. Why did you not tell her?"

"Thank you, you are very kind,—will you, then, send a note for me, that I may get my aunt's direction? and when I am rested a little I will go."

"I will send a note wherever you please; but won't you have some tea first?"

"Yes, if you like."

"You shall have some, and then you can start for Brighton immediately. You should not have gone away so quickly this morning. I thought that

I should still find you when I came up-stairs again."

"Did you?" (simply).

"Yes. Why did you not tell my mother all about yourself?"


"I think I should have told her, perhaps, only she was very busy about other things."

"Now, lie down upon the sofa again and rest: you look half dead. You know we are cousins; you can stay here with my mother."

"Thank you; but you see there is my aunt."

"Yes, of course, you are going to Brighton directly you have had tea." When he laughed about Brighton, she gave up the subject, and laid quietly down upon the sofa. He went away, but when he reached the door, came back, and then smoothed her hair with his hand. "You are not angry with me, are you, for ordering you about so unceremoniously?"

"No," she replied, sadly: her face flushed momentarily, but she did not open her eyes. She still felt that she ought not to be there, and must go quickly. The tea came presently, and then Mrs. Erskine; her son had told her all about Georgy, and she did nothing but reproach herself for the morning's heartlessness, kissed Georgy, and insisted upon her going instantly to bed. It was of no use resisting, for Mrs. Erskine was not easily contradicted.




She had not drunk the tea, so she should have brandy and water.

Georgy remonstrated. James suggested that if Miss Sandon did not like it, she had better be left alone. "It was good for her,—James knew nothing about sick young ladies, and was not to interfere." Then the two ladies went up-stairs, Mrs. Erskine maintaining "that James would be late for dinner, if he did not dress immediately." "It was not far across the park where he was going, and he shouldn't," was his answer. He came, laughing, half-way up the staircase to inquire "if Miss Sandon would not start for Brighton immediately?"

"Now, do go at once, James," said Mrs. Erskine; and at last he did go. Hearing them talk and laugh, made Georgy feel more at home than any systematic comfort could have done. Mrs. Erskine said that she should not talk; but before she left her, had received a whole account of Georgy's departure from Grainthorpe, and the reasons for it. She heartily sympathized with Georgy's behaviour, and wanted to write to Mr. Sandon immediately; taking up the whole affair as heartily as if she herself had been requested to marry Captain Anstruther.

Nearly all the next day Georgy lay in bed, in a dreamy passive state of happiness. She could hear the voice of Mrs. Erskine and her son as they talked in the mother's room, and she heard his step on the



staircase as he went down-stairs again. Then Mrs. Erskine came in and out with various little details of her household doings, and the news of London, which made her gradually realize that this was London, not Grainthorpe. In the evening she came down, and sat alone in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Erskine and James were out again. To go out two evenings running seemed a great stretch of dissipation to Georgy: she wondered if it was very amusing? Wondered what was the mental condition of any one who went out two evenings running? Whether they ever remembered any one particular person long, or cared for them much? She watched the carriages passing, as the fashionable world went to and fro, and then caught glimpses of people in the drawing-room opposite. She hardly dared to touch the pianoforte that first strange evening, and she sat idly at the window till it grew dark, and she was half asleep; and long before the other two came home, Georgy had gone to her room and was asleep in reality.

Nearly a month was passed by her with the Erskines; they would not let her go to Brighton; and when her aunt, or rather great-aunt, returned to London, Mrs. Erskine had decided upon taking Georgy with her to Millthorpe Grange, and from thence attempting, or rather insisting upon, a reconciliation with her Uncle Robert. Georgy sincerely

wished to go to Miss Sparrow's; but Mrs. Erskine so resolutely urged upon her the duty of attempting to make peace with Grainthorpe, that she consented to remain with them. Mrs. Erskine rather romantically adopted Georgy's declaration that she would begin to teach music. "Certainly, it was what she would do in Georgy's place." And she began to talk of her having a few lessons, and beginning to work at music.

Mr. Erskine treated all this as romance, and said that he had not expected his mother would put such wild ideas into Georgy's head.

"But what is she to do, my dear?"

"Oh! something will turn up: something will be settled soon, I dare say."

"But if nothing is. One could not advise it: that would go against one's conscience; but if she would only sober down sufficiently to marry this good, excellent man, it would perhaps be the best thing."

"Good, excellent idiot! She was quite right to refuse him, poor child."

"I wish she could go back to Grainthorpe: it will never do for her to break with Mr. Sandon."

"Horrid people! She is much better away."

"Don't be foolish: what is she to do, James?"

"Well, marry that inane idiot, or—somebody else. I dare say you are right, mother, women will marry

anybody;" he uttered this comprehensive axiom with philosophic bitterness. "Only, indeed, it is utter nonsense to talk of little Georgy's getting those silly ideas about music into her head; it is like yourself, dear mother, who take up things so warmly, to encourage her: besides she would not be able yet to play in public."

"I never thought that she would; but she might certainly give lessons."

"That would not suit her: she could not, poor dear child; she is too excitable for such grinding work: it would wear her to death."

"How you do talk! Georgy is particularly sensible and calm; not in the very least excitable, I should say; and all the happier for it, no doubt: besides, is nobody ever to do what they don't like in this world?" And then the conversation dropped.

Julia had gone to Edinburgh, where Mrs. Erskine proposed soon to follow her; and it was settled that she should take Georgy to Millthorpe Grange: whence she had decided, in her own mind, that the reconciliation should take place with Mr. Sandon, who was very angry, and refused to be reconciled to Georgy, unless she could give some satisfactory reason for her conduct.

Georgy's life, in the meantime, was the most eventful she had ever passed. She spent early mornings playing or reading in the drawing-room;

then people came to call, and James always wanted to know why she would not talk more? She answered, that people who had lived at Grainthorpe could not be expected to talk, and that listening was sufficient occupation.. She drove out with Mrs. Erskine, and the ladies' drives were very pleasant; Mrs. Erskine paid visits, whilst Georgy sat in the carriage.

Sometimes they drove into the country: the London country—amongst dusty lilacs, elms, and clipped limes. The elder lady talked sometimes about her children, sometimes perhaps about other things. Georgy was a good listener; she certainly possessed that requisite for agreeability. Again and again Mrs. Erskine spoke of James: she dreaded her son's marriage with anybody, and yet was always anxious that it should take place. The more she disliked it, the more she desired that it should be over. That he should make himself a name, a house, and a position, was the wish that lay nearest of all others to her heart; try as she might to disguise it to herself by talking of the worthlessness of this world's goods. She was often ready to talk of Mrs. Everett; not, of course, as if she could take any vital interest in her, but indifferently, as she might mention any of the little idiosyncrasies of an Empress of China. She hoped that her son's wife would never stand between them, "else what good would her life do

her;" and then she came out frankly with the wish that her son would marry soon.

"There is no one at Ilderton, where he goes often: the girls are perfect misses; I do not count them, consequently there *is* no one."

"Mr. Erskine seems to enjoy himself tolerably at Ilderton, I think," answered Georgy; "he often used to talk about it."

"Yes; married people *are* pleasanter than girls. Mrs. Edgar Everett is a very agreeable person, I am told; besides poor young Mrs. Francis; but you can't marry a married person, you know."

Georgy laughed at this defiant truism, and did not refute it by suggesting that Mrs. Francis Everett was a widow now. "Girls are not generally very amusing," she said; "I should not care much for their society myself, if I were a man."

"My dear, I must tell you one thing—never be sarcastic, with men especially: they will not like you for it; and the older you grow, the more you will feel how really unwomanly it is."

"Indeed, dear Mrs. Erskine, I dislike sarcasm very much in theory, so I hope I do not practise it much."

"Well now, remember: James, he is one of ourselves; but other people you should take a little more care to please: you are short rather than sarcastic to them. James, you know, does not signify, and he likes you so much as you are."

She smiled and laughed out quietly : " No, he does not signify," and now their drive ended.

An irresistible fit of inward hilarity had seized Georgy, and she momentarily enjoyed a joke against herself.

" He did not signify!" and what else on earth did? Were there many other people in the world living such a passive life as herself? for she might never own that he "signified." And something whispered that it was, perhaps, a misfortune, her having ever come to that house.

Her infatuation might have passed more quickly—passed as many others must do, so ardent and absorbing, raised upon far slenderer grounds than this one was. So frail, so almost laughable is the foundation of our youth's great reality, that many a love will not bear to be chronicled: it must go, and we shall laugh ourselves some day.

Georgy saw other people besides these two, whilst she was in London. In spite of Mrs. Erskine's professions that she was too old to lead other than a hermit's life, she went out pretty often, and once or twice took Georgy. James was always either out, or hard at work, excepting when his mother received in the evening. Her eldest daughter Alice was in town now, after having been for many years abroad; and her two daughters were grown up; so a good deal of work fell upon the grandmother, who took

them out, and asked people to her house for their sakes. Georgy thought that for a hermitage this was not a lonely house; though Mr. Erskine, too, said that he had almost given up the world, and had become an anchorite.

Mrs. Erskine knew many artists and literary people: indeed she was no mean artist herself; and Georgy saw all these people, who spoke a language and lived a life that was utterly beyond her. To grow clever—to grow clever—that was her desire; and it seemed as if the desperation of her volition must effect that change. It was a confused desire that animated her. The abstract love of books she had lost: she looked upon them only as a means of living up to and participating in the life of those around her. How utterly shut out from them she felt, and how jealous she was of their powers! It was not vanity which gave birth to this; but the sense of what her own nothingness must be in James Erskine's eyes, as she listened to the well-trained sparkling talkers who were of his world. She saw directly and felt keenly the difference that lay between them: to talk amongst those people would have been to do violence to herself, and perfect silence fell upon her.

No one, perhaps, can feel intellectual abasement more than a woman who loves a man far superior to herself, and may never hope to approach him but

through reaching his intelligence. The wife of such a man is in a very different position. She has more, far more, and can abandon that cold restless strife after intellectual commune: she has him in hours of grief and sickness, trouble and annoyance; when he is genuinely himself. It is through something more than cleverness that she must keep him, and then she lives her own, her natural life.

Everything for the moment sank in importance with Georgy beside this vicarious love of knowledge. These feelings were not always upon her, however: often she seemed to have changed places with James, who was much graver than he used to be. Georgy had fallen into the habit of laughing at nothing, he said, and then often ended by following her example. Now and then her vanity was gratified amongst the people whom she stood so much in awe of. She was asked to play, and did so; there were not many people there, but they all listened, and all praised her. *That* was nothing to her; she only cared that James should be there, and know that she could do something.

The next night there were some people again at "the hermitage."

"You look as if those people inspired you with a good deal of veneration, Miss Sandon."

"Well, they do: your people," she answered, dubiously, as if afraid of owning to her weakness.

"All those who come here are so ——— clever, and talk so well, I *do* envy them a little, and wish ———"

"To do clever talk likewise? Well, keep your illusion, as you have not yet discovered its vanity. You bestow a vast depth of admiration on these people, I see."

"It *is* pleasant to hear them."

"To hear intellectual slang? Oh! you would soon smile at that good lady who is holding forth upon the sofa. When she had used the tremendous phrase, 'A glorious intelligence' for the fourth time (having applied it to three directly opposite people), I made my escape. She imagined that the words implied a most searching analysis of something or somebody: and really she is a fair type of so many, now-a-days."

"I like intellectual mimicry better than nothing," Georgy answered, with imploring obstinacy: "but I understand what you mean, and I dare say in a little while I should feel it."

"I do not disparage brilliant conversation; I love it myself only too well: it is the most enjoyable of all luxuries. But the greatest people are not always the most lavish of it. Every day the quantity of intellectual slang increases, assisted by Germanically-turned phrases. It spoils some people so, who would know about a few things, if they would not embrace everything. All the world has opinions."

"Cheap books bring that about."

"Yes; and all honour to cheap books: but they have given the world a sort of fictitious development, which occasionally rouses one's organ of combativeness. Everybody judges of everything now."

"And you call all that 'intellectual slang.'"

"I do: an old Frenchman said, 'Il est si difficile de parler de quoi que ce soit, avec qui que ce soit.' The parrot-like bits of eclecticism that are the fashion make that truer than ever."

"All that edifies me, I believe; but I am not sure," she replied.

"Perhaps, then, you respect any person who has ever written a book, irrespective of what its contents may be."

"How did you know that?"

"I guessed it, after considerable reflection."

"Well, I do, or rather I *used* to do so. But do you pretend that literature is all vanity? If you lived without it, I think you would soon change your mind."

"Well, and what are Miss Sandon's views respecting it?" he returned, amused at her vehemence.

"That it is something very grand and satisfactory to write a good book."

"Yes, to pour out your whole soul, express your life in one ardent burst of passion and pathos (he was not laughing). Yes, you think so, and many

others have thought that too: but you cannot do it."

"No?"

"No, my lady; that is a dream. Writing is very pleasant, but no one can say all they think and feel through it. Words are more limited than our nature."

"I had some sort of an indefinite notion that great people could ——"

"Not even in that wondrous bit of aspiring egotism—a first book."

"Well, it is a comfort to those who cannot write, to think that the completeness of the satisfaction is not so great;" and, taking up a new novel that lay there, she added, "the writer of this is very clever, surely."

"Yes; but judge of no one quite by a first book. We do not know the exact proportions of what goes to the making of it; the vast expenditure of self perhaps: some violent feeling may do a great deal, some excitement fed by the mere strength of youth."

"What! Then they write on the strength of that, and afterwards can do no more?"

"Never so much again—their best is over."

"The feeling must have been a true one, at any rate."

"Yes; if we knew everything, we should see, I dare say, that some books are costly to their writers.

But you do not believe in all this, and in what Michelet calls 'Les misères du monde parleur et du monde scribe.'"

"You have taken refuge with me, being cynical to-night, because I can talk of nothing, and there is no fear of my writing—thank you."

He did not answer her taunt in the laughing tone in which it was made; but said, in a quiet, reverential way, as if he were talking to himself: "You!—I wish all the world were like you."

That checked her. If he ever approved seriously of anything she said or did, she was always embarrassed. She knew he liked her sayings and doings, and she would repay any laughing compliments or comments upon her behaviour with careless gibes. And yet she was often indefinably afraid of him; and a dry word, or even a serious one from him, could make her shy. One often sees women so: they talk nonsense to a man of whom they are afraid.

One evening Mrs. Erskine was out, and James too. Georgy was sitting alone in the drawing-room when he returned. "She had fancied that he was dining out."

"No; he had dined at his club, and was not going anywhere that evening. Was his mother out?"

He knew that she was, otherwise he would not have returned.

"He was in Miss Sandon's way, and would go down to his own room."

"Not at all."

So that evening they spent together: talked and laughed, then grew serious and moralized. It was almost the counterpart of one day which she had spent at Monklands nearly two years ago.

It was next week that a great ball was to take place, the largest and prettiest of the season, given by Mrs. Evelyn Lorraine, who would spend some seven hundred pounds or so upon her evening's entertainment. Everyone was going, and those who did not go, were manœuvring to manage it. Mrs. Erskine's granddaughters had come one morning in the freshness of their joy; for they were going, and an animated conversation about dress was in progress.

The two girls were very fond and proud of their young uncle, who rode with them, took an interest in all their troubles, and was deep in their confidence concerning their dress. He assisted for some time at the council, and then left the three young ladies together, and went to his mother, who was writing in the other drawing-room.

"Do you mean to take Miss Sandon, mother?"

"Where?"

"To Mrs. Evelyn Lorraine's."

"My dear, what would be the use? She does not

know a human creature: besides, I must ask to take her, which I should not like to do; it is out of the question."

"Why, poor child?"

"She must have a new dress, which would be foolish for her."

"When is a new dress ever foolish for a woman, pray?"

"James, I really think she would not care about it enough to make it worth the trouble: besides, I must ask, you know."

"Oh! I'll do that," he said, carelessly.


"Will you? then, indeed, you might do me a good turn, and get an invitation for Mrs. Alvanly and her girl: they would give anything to go."

"Thank you," said James, desperately, moving back a few steps from the writing table. "Any more people to ask for? If Mrs. Lorraine does not forbid me her house for evermore, I should not receive my deserts: she has too many people already. Indeed, I could not, mother."

"Then what will she say to your putting a Miss Sandon upon her?"

"She's very good-natured, and I'll manage it, if you will only take Georgy."

"Very well," said Mrs. Erskine, laughing at his eagerness, and perfectly ready to consent to anything.



James went back to Miss Sandon to ask if she would not like to go to Mrs. Lorraine's ball: he knew that moderation would be but affectation. She had been wondering vaguely what it would be like, rather than wishing to go; but his words aroused a more active desire, and she looked up, saying, "I should like it very much."


"Then you have as great an appetite for gaiety as the rest of womankind;" and it was all settled.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON Miss Sparrow's return from Brighton, she behaved most kindly to her niece, but fully concurred with Mrs. Erskine in thinking it best that she should go back to Millthorpe Grange, and from there, if possible, to Grainthorpe. It was more cheerful for Georgy to spend her few remaining days with the Erskines, and she would not hear of her niece's removing to her own dull house. Miss Sparrow had a habit of talking to herself occasionally, and went on: "Yes, dear, yes; it would be a very nice thing: only, of course, you are too reasonable."

"What!" exclaimed Georgy, whose thoughts were running upon the expense of journeys, and thinking how, if she went to Millthorpe Grange, and a reconciliation took place, she *must* return to Grainthorpe. Journeying back to her aunt's would be so expensive.

"I could not help the other day wishing that you



should marry James Erskine: Mr. Erskine, I suppose, I ought to say: more unlikely things have happened," she said, knowingly: "I think he likes you very much; though perhaps I am foolish for telling you so. I wish people did not always think to much about money."

"Why should they not?" returned Georgy, laughing constrainedly. "I do not know that Mr. Erskine has any intentions of marrying any one at present, either rich or poor."

"My dear, you are not vexed, are you?"

"No; of course not, aunt," she replied, regaining her old manner.

"Ah, Georgy, little girls sometimes think of such things, though they will not own it!"

And when Georgy left her aunt, she did think about it, though not of it: that was an impossibility. Her aunt's words went for nothing; but they had tortured her. Oh! she was poor; yet in her own heart she boldly compared herself to Gertrude Stanley, of whom she knew that it was Mrs. Erskine's darling dream that she should marry her son. Miss Stanley was rich and beautiful, but take away the money, and Georgy could hold her ground against Miss Stanley; but for herself to marry James, would, in a worldly point of view for him, be folly. Just then poverty seemed to her

to express annihilation, and she thought of the words of Faust's Margaret:—

“Nach Golde drängt
Am Golde hängt
Doch Alles! Ach wir Armen!”

Many a one has thought that; and not always in direct selfishness. Mothers fancy that money will smooth the evils of life for their children. Money, money! will buy love even, think some, who are cold to their inmost hearts for lack of it.

It is a sad, sordid calculation; and a very cowardly one, no doubt. But forgive it, you who estimate money more truly—you who prize more highly the free gift of your love. So much magnanimity is not always wisdom acquired, but immunity from the need of wisdom.

Two days before Mrs. Erskine and Georgy left London, they went to the ball. This great ball was an event for Georgy, who knew nothing of London. Alice and her daughters had arrived, and Mrs. Erskine was bent upon finding them. They struggled up the great staircase, and got through the crowd into the centre room, where there was no dancing, but only a tumultuous passing to and fro. To Georgy, who knew no one, the crowd, the lights, and the confusion, were the only definite impressions which she received at first; then presently she became aware of flowers, and that the

room opened into a long narrow conservatory full of bright plants; and then, that if they escaped the risk of being trampled upon in their present position, they might be deafened, for they were close to the orchestra.

Mrs. Erskine was talking eagerly, but did not forget Georgy, to whom she introduced a fragile very young gentleman, who asked her to dance. The crowd was too great to render dancing very pleasant, so they walked about, and the young gentleman pointed out to his companion the notabilities; she soon began to take an interest in the bystanders. The crushing dance was over, and Georgy, standing again by Mrs. Erskine, was still talking to her companion: he was dilating to her on the fatigues and responsibilities which going out entailed; and she was answering him with rather ludicrous gravity, trying how long he would remain unconscious of her impertinent simplicity! Mr. Erskine came behind her, and presently inquired, "how she dared to 'chaff' her young friend so openly?"

"He likes me very much," she maintained.


"He is a 'Parti,' do you know?"

"Well, he has a great deal in him; as I, and all prudent ladies can tell."

The Stanleys just then came up, and Mr. Erskine presently went off to dance with Miss Stanley.

Gertrude Stanley was beautiful; it was not too strong a word to use as you looked for the first time upon that splendid mass of womanhood—tall and largely built, but well-proportioned. They said she needed fining down, and would look better if she grew thinner. But *they* were mostly envious women, whose figures depended upon the make of their dresses. She *was* beautiful, with her rich glowing complexion and look of perfect health, her profusion of brown hair, her bright hazel eyes, and her regular profile. It was an amount of positive beauty seldom seen; the form and the colour incontrovertibly perfect. She had about the same original capacity as her brother; and, though not belonging to that class of whom it may be said that it would be a positive blessing if they could not read, still a little wholesome neglect and deficiency in education would have improved her.


Georgy sat a long while by herself. For some time Mr. Erskine and Miss Stanley were opposite to her: she liked to watch them; for she never felt at rest if he were not near her, till she knew to whom he was talking. She watched these two people without jealousy. Mrs. Erskine, she was sure, would like Gertrude to marry her son, and Georgy's thoughts flew rapidly to that conclusion, without the pang which the thought of his marriage sometimes gave. Gertrude was enunciating some piece of



naïve wisdom about politics, and James respectfully listening.

There is wisdom in the prudent limitation of our prayer-book, "A man may not marry his grandmother:" a deep symbolism is involved in it, if no literal application. It means that a man shall not marry one who, although she may be wise, good, and even well-favoured, has no real power over his heart. Women sometimes give up men; nay, would even seek out and kneel before their future wives: let them be models of wisdom and goodness; but "let him marry his grandmother," is the inner thought of that agonized heroism. It was a selfish feeling akin to this which made Georgy accept the vision of Mr. Erskine's marriage which rose before her.


She was brought back to the ball, the people, and the recollection of Mrs. Evelyn Lorraine's greatness, by Mr. Erskine, who had come to ask her to dance with him. She assented, struggled through a quadrille, laughed and talked, and explored the refreshment room; till suddenly he asked, in mentioning the day when she had first arrived at their house, "Was I not in a detestably gloomy humour that morning?" It was said laughingly and gently, and yet it annoyed her intensely: she did not like that cool way of making amends, if any were required. She answered, laughing, but shortly:



"Indeed, I did not remark any alteration in you." After that everything grew less pleasant: she was glad even to leave James when they saw Mrs. Erskine, who was seeking them to go home.

They talked eagerly on the way back, and Georgy said that she had enjoyed herself very much. Mrs. Erskine went rapidly upstairs, and Georgy followed, but stood with her hand upon her door, and listened as she heard Mr. Erskine's voice downstairs, and his footsteps as he went into his sitting-room. She would not have prolonged her visit there a day, if by her own wish she could have done so; and yet she reckoned up every hour that yet remained to her, as a miser would his hoard: every footstep that she heard, and every time she looked at him, she computed as a sort of gain. Then a twinge of vexation came upon her, as she still heard those words, "Was I not in a detestable humour that morning?" They had been said with a faint tone of royalty, which made the remembrance of them intolerable to her.

She felt that she was in a false position. What had she come there for? and the words returned to her again, carrying with them a homily of their own. Then she tried to turn against him, to criticise him, and to reflect coldly; but she could not find in her heart one harsh thought. All that he said was well said; all that he did was well done. She



loved him in all ways, as mothers love their children: for his virtues, and still more for his faults. Then she started again, and her heart beat violently as she heard his footsteps when he came upstairs and shut the door of his room. Life was very long she thought, as she lay down that night, and remembered that one more day would end this.

The next morning passed quickly. Georgy never saw Mr. Erskine, and in the evening she was left alone again. There was a lurking hope in her breast that perhaps he would come again: it had grown up in spite of herself. She had not seen him all day, and so—perhaps: but it grew late, and her vision was not destined to be realized. She sat at the window, watching the line of lamps which seemed to urge the departure of the summer twilight. Those lamps and that dull, bald street meant home to her; and to-morrow she would leave home, and never find it again. She always knew his footsteps and felt his approach; but this time Mr. Erskine had pushed back the curtain which hung between the drawing-rooms, and was standing by her before she was aware of his presence.

“Oh! you have come,” she said, abruptly.

“Why, did you expect me?”

“No; not at all,” she answered (still more abruptly), and took up her work; sitting with her back to the window, where she could not by any possibility see.

"You cannot see."

"I forgot," she said, laughing, and turned towards the window.

"You are very industrious."

"Well, one must do something."

"I never heard you moralise so sternly before."

Then there was a short pause. She had never mentioned Grainthorpe to him when she could help it; never spoke to him of her quarrel with her uncle; and if he ever alluded to it, always resolutely passed over the subject—now he mentioned it suddenly.

"Georgy—Miss Sandon, you are not very happy at Grainthorpe?"

She looked up at him and coloured. "Tell me, if it is not an impertinent question; you were engaged by your uncle's desire, not your own."

"No, no, I did it—it was my doing—I wanted to get away—I did it," she said, rather incoherently.

"My child, was it only to get away from Grainthorpe that you engaged yourself?"

She got up quickly, and going to the window, sat down there, and said, "It was very foolish of me; but I shall make myself quite happy at Grainthorpe: I am not going to marry at all."

"Not?"

"No."

She did not see him half smile at her effort to brave it out unconcernedly. She had never looked

so childlike as when she uttered that deliberate decision, "No;" and she was *too unconcerned* to look at him. He sat down beside her in the window, and bent very near her. He had bent down so once before; and her heart beat as it had done once before, by the pianoforte at the Grange. There was so much deference, and so much gentle respect in his manner, and yet it was so calmly assured—it always fascinated and mastered her.

"Do you love no one, then?"

He took her hand; but his sentence appeared so completely finished, that she drew back, and snatched her hand away. It seemed as if he were cross-questioning her at his pleasure. For one instant he looked at her as she crimsoned, and her eyes grew angry and full of tears; then he said, quite humbly:

"Could you ever be my wife? Do you love me enough?"

She did not lift her eyes, and, as if the words were very difficult to speak, she said: "You know I do."



CHAPTER XV.

THE world's course was not arrested that night: all was the same as it had ever been: but to Georgy there was another world, and a new life, for she was engaged to James Erskine. He had come near her at last, and she had some possession in one who had so long held her. It was a knowledge like that of heaven, too good to be all embraced at once; and her surprise was so great, that it seemed as if that evening was still a vision. She had made Mr. Erskine smile by the way in which she deprecated the mention of the few days during which she had been engaged to Stephen; and James had talked, he knew so well how—talked those commonplaces, which once in a lifetime sound so sublime to every one. The two people in the drawing-room started as they heard the wheels of the brougham which announced Mrs. Erskine's return: Georgy looked at Mr. Erskine.

“There is my mother.”

“Yes, here she is. Goodnight,” she said, timidly.

“We will talk to her to-morrow,” he answered.

“Goodnight, then.”


Georgy did not like that word to-morrow ; she would have given a great deal if she could have retarded Mrs. Erskine's arrival but one half-hour, and to have spoken to her then ; yet had not the courage to meet her at that moment. They had neither of them left the room when Mrs. Erskine appeared : they need not have been afraid, however ; for she was one of those people who either see everything or nothing. Once struck, she would perhaps have divined a love affair, a secret, or some hidden entanglement, very quickly and justly ; or, on the other hand, such a web might have been woven from beginning to end before her eyes, without a doubt or thought upon the subject entering her mind. She was too thoroughly engrossed by her own pre-occupations, was always too actively doing, and participating too directly in everything, for keen observation ; and, like many of us, she would judge far more correctly of people who were unconnected with her, than of those who lay the nearest to her.

Mrs. Erskine was surprised that Georgy had not gone to bed, when she knew how tired they should be to-morrow by their journey. Why had James come home so early ? It was very late, but still she wanted to talk to him a little. Georgy disappeared, and James listened rather absently to his mother's talk about Julia, money matters, &c. He would

not tell her that night: he knew that it would be a blow to her rather indefinite and exalted visions: but she liked Georgy very much, and he soon imagined her reconciled to the prospect.


James bade his mother goodnight, and then went down to his own room, in a more composed state of mind than Georgy was that evening. But he really loved her: her youth and her simplicity were a pleasant resting-place for his thoughts. He knew, too, that she loved him: knew it with a certainty that left no room for doubt or anxiety. Constance Everett had been the passion of his life, and he had lavished adoration upon her, which he could never have to spend again: it could not be. He might no more love Georgy so, than she, if separated from him, could ever again give an equal measure of her love to any other human being. Love is never equal: it was very truly said: "*Il y a toujours l'un qui baise, l'autre qui tend la joue.*"

Constance had repaid him ill for a long friendship. Six months ago she had written him a taunting, bitter letter, and thus freed herself from the necessity of keeping up an acquaintance, which might have become importunate. She was rich and independent, and so had no further need of him. So closely had one event followed the other, that he half-believed she knew, if not of her husband's death, at least



that he was past the hopes of recovery, when she had written to him. A short, formal note, which he had addressed to her a little time afterwards had remained unanswered, and he had every reason to believe that she had cast him off. The circumstantial evidence respecting the date of her husband's death and of her letter was strong, and his doubts had gradually become certainties.


All people have sometimes a season of mental desperation and aberration, when they do exactly what their friends would least expect. Mr. Erskine had loved Georgy during the reaction of disappointment; because he was thrown back upon himself and needed something to love, and because perhaps she was the very opposite of Constance. To him, Georgy had never willingly spoken of her quarrel with her uncle and her refusal to marry Captain Anstruther. If he ever mentioned it, she always grew reserved, and she had never once in any way placed herself before him, so as to ask his sympathy. This touched him; for she knew at least that he liked her, though she had never any idea of turning that liking to her own profit. So all through these days, when she had been colder, and had shown less outward satisfaction at his presence than formerly, he had been more really drawn towards her than he had ever been before.



She had not known it, for she was too much engrossed to retain any inward self-possession in her observation of him. He was too close to her now; he interested her too deeply: she could neither observe rightly nor judge him truly. Till that evening she had never thought it possible that he should really care for her; though a far duller person than she was might have discovered it.

There was no truer proof of how much he had loved Constance, than this sudden transition of feeling. This was not heroic: perhaps not sentimental; but it sometimes happens in the world. Insensibly his resolution had been formed, although the acting upon it that evening was a sudden impulse. Now a calm future lay before him, and love which was to be freely given, not earned with difficulty. Now the deed was done, and the longing for the home and the fireside which a wife alone can gratify, was to be satisfied. He was very happy, but quietly happy, and rather thought that that was the best state of mind in which to enter upon matrimony.

As he turned to leave the room, his eye fell by chance upon a picture there, a pretty French engraving, hanging over the chimney-piece. Gisèle was the figure's name. Who Gisèle was mattered little to him; he had once bought it, because it had really a striking likeness to Constance



Everett. Now he felt provoked with himself for having ever put it there. That picture sobered him, and brought the involuntary thought, "I am not young." Who *is* young before the recollection of a dead passion?


CHAPTER XVI.

THE next day came, bringing with it cares and events which pressed on utterly regardless of the two lovers. James was suddenly oppressed by fresh affairs, and Mrs. Erskine alarmed and grieved by evil tidings of her sick daughter.

It was a hurried morning that they passed; and not through a spirit of procrastination did James defer to announce his engagement to his mother, but really because she was so unhappy that it would have seemed a selfishness to have troubled her with it that morning: although he disliked that mode of communication, still he would write it to her.

Georgy was disappointed, when, in the middle of the day, the hour for their departure arrived. James said that he would write to his mother; or, if Georgy liked it better, should he wait till in a few days he was able to go to Millthorpe Grange and join them?

She wished that he had done it already; but it was almost with indifference that she replied:—"It should be as he liked," and did not even state her



preference for waiting till he came. She startled him a little by her indifference.

"But what do you wish?" he said again, impatient for an answer.

"Well, then, I should like better to wait till you come—much better—Mr. Erskine."

"Will you never call me by my name?"

"Very well, James," she said, laughing and colouring, but coming a little nearer to him.

She had begun by committing a capital error very early in her love. She had no will apart from his, and never reflected how much this might make her lose. He was her god; but she did not remember that he could not read her heart; and she was not always careful enough to answer to his far more demonstrative disposition. To one who loves such a nature as hers is often a misfortune.

All this did not apply, however, that day, for they were both happy, and both talked and laughed at every moment which could be so disposed of; and then at last came the time when they must separate. That morning was the first time that Georgy had ever been in James' sitting-room down stairs, and one of her first exclamations was:—

"Oh! that engraving is very like Mrs. Everett!"

"Do you think so?"

"Yes; how pretty and graceful she is!"

"Very," he said, coldly.

"Poor thing, she had a melancholy fate: it is well that she is a widow now."

"Was she unhappy with her head or her heart, I wonder?"—and one of his rapid changes of expression passed quickly over his face: he seemed about to speak again of her, but did not, and went on quickly to talk of something else.

"What are you looking at?" he asked, as she bent down to one of the lowest shelves, where she had taken out a thick, purple-coloured book,—“Oh! that is the Bible which my father ——”

"I want it," she said, laughing, but very shyly—"I want it—give it to me—I remember it, a long time ago."

"Where?"


"In that little old room at Monklands, where you found me that day you drove me home so late."

"Poor old Monklands! Yes, I remember very well the day I found you there, and how pleasant *you* were," he answered, in a loving, courtly way.

That day Mrs. Erskine and Georgy set off; James went with them to the station. All these days he had taken a thousand little cares of Georgy:—towards those whom he loved he was almost womanly in the service and attention he lavished on them; and a short time had so accustomed Georgy to this, that it was not only James that she

missed, but his care and protection.—She was still confused with happiness.

Mrs. Erskine talked of Julia, about whom she was very anxious: the more so, as she was still forbidden to see her. Each time Georgy looked at the old woman, something weighed upon her heart, and she only escaped from the burden by the thought that surely her love was worth something to James; but how would Mrs. Erskine, who had been so kind to her, take the consequences brought forth by that kindness.—Georgy was softened by happiness, which brought, too, its own revelations. She had not so much pitied herself, as grown listless and apathetic all these years.—The old teaching of her childhood, till now grown cold and meaningless to her, returned.—Why had she done this?—Why had she let those feelings slide out of her heart that it is often a woman's part to keep alive in man?—Why had she so lost them as to feel them only through her earthly love? She felt everything through that, and now could only so repent. If she had sometimes said within herself that she had done nothing to deserve her fate, she felt that she certainly had done nothing beyond others to entitle her to have her whole mind so granted. She saw things now that she had never seen before; only recognised them amongst the moral commonplaces repeated to ourselves, and which have no real meaning to us.




She did not love her lover because of his intellect—she had long felt that. None ever truly loved who did not quickly shrink from the blasphemy of such a definition. And now the last stone of the altar where she had worshipped intellect was fallen, and she wished herself a higher, better nature to offer him; but not of mind—of soul.—She had never cared for herself as she did then, or wished more earnestly that she were better worth.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE two ladies spent several days at Millthorpe Grange without any incident of note occurring. Some other guests arrived:—Mrs. Lumsden, who recalled to Georgy her long former visit at the same house, and how different all things were to her then;—one or two gentlemen, whose names and attributes are of no consequence here;—and then Mrs. Everett, the deepest gloom of whose widowhood was held to be passed.

The children had run home first, on the afternoon when she arrived. They were carrying baskets of flowers for the drawing-room and the staircase, and the ladies were following more slowly. “Mrs. Everett is come, mamma,” was announced in the hall. The drawing room window, which was level with the terrace, was open, and Constance was sitting in the window on a low stool; some flowers were tumbled upon her knee, and a heap of them were lying on the little table just above her head. The bright sun was pouring over her, her lustreless black gown, and the flowers; the thick rolls of her fair hair, so like



that of Titian's ladies, was golden in the sunlight, and the picture would have been almost too bright without her black robes. The Afghan's praise of a young Englishman was fit for her, too: "If she were to lie down in the shade, there would be no shadow there!"

"Dear Margaret! I am so glad to be here at last: everything is lovely, and I was never sure that it was summer till I came."

"Why it is late on in the year, to be only just aware of it."


"It is so hot and glaring by the seaside, and there is never a tree to be seen."

"I thought you would like it."

"So I did once, but I never wish to behold it again: I went there for my health, and I know that I should have had softening of the brain if I had stayed," and she pushed up her open white sleeves, and clasped her white arms above her head.

She was restless and excited all that day, and cut short her friend Margaret whenever she mentioned any member of the Stanley family; whilst Mrs. Lewis, on her part, was rather beginning to wonder what her friendship with the Stanleys and the visible adoration of Sir Hugh would bring forth.

"Georgy," said Mrs. Everett, next morning, "come and sit on the terrace and tell me all the news—I am so glad to see you again;" and her pleasant beaming



smile corroborated the words.—“Is any one else coming here?”

“Mr. Erskine, in a day or two—no one else that I know of.”

“James Erskine—Mr. Erskine coming!”—she said slowly, looking into the distance as if she was thinking of something else. “I am so bored by all these people, I wish Mrs. Lumsden and everybody was gone: what a tiresome woman she is!”

“Rather: but she cannot do us any harm,” said Georgy, quietly.

“If there is an odious thing, it is an English-woman who does French: I believe that she has been to Paris once for a week, and she behaves as if all other lands were strange to her. How pleasant it is here!—one is always glad of summer; but I have never been so glad before, perhaps because it is all that I have to rejoice over.”

“Mrs. Everett, I do not think that.”

“Oh, Georgy, how small and narrow life is compared to what one dreamt it once: do you remember that bit in Petrarch?—

. ‘Conosciuto il mondo
Non cresce, anzi si scema, ed assai più vasto
L’etra sonante, e l’alma terra, e il mare
Al fanciullin, che non al saggio appare.’—

‘That is true,’ she said, in her sweet voice, which, when she spoke gravely and slowly, had a way of

vibrating in its fluency, as if she were struggling with some deep feeling.

"Yes, that is true to us all sometimes; but now, the world will surely have something else to offer you: you cannot be tired of it yet—why do you not go to Italy?"

"I used to long to do so once; but now I am totally indifferent. I think sometimes of the man who yearned after Italy, saying that he was '*avide de pierres taillées*,' and was soon glad to return to the quiet of Nature. They say that love is a delusion; but friendship—so little account is taken of that: no one even thinks of railing at it."

"But, Mrs. Everett, *you* have many friends."

"Very few. I have nothing nearer, and perhaps never shall have: I have very few friends, Georgy.—Have you heard any music lately?"

"None; I wish you would play now."

"I will, for it will be something to do."

They went in, and she played a little while, and then began to talk again: "How strange it is to look at any one soberly with the eyes of the flesh, when once upon a time you have loved him."

Georgy laughed at the solemn expression of such a disenchantment. "Take care you do not tempt the whole world to go mad for you!" she answered.

"Georgy, pray you to be always kept from

the temptation of a *grande passion*," retorted Mrs. Everett.

"Why?"

"Why? because you are a *one-idead* nature. I was reading the other day of a *one-idead* nature, and stopped to consider who, of every one I knew, could best illustrate that: I thought of you then; you give me more the impression of being such an one, than any other person I know."

"Your brains are wool-gathering to day; but I like to hear you all the same.

She sang again, then talked and sang, beginning almost before the tears were out of her eyes. Georgy listened and admired. That gifted woman was always involving her in a fit of wonderment, and those words of Currer Bell's recurred to her—"impressionable, but not impressible"—she was changing and yet true:

"For surely they're sincerest,
Who are strongest acted on by what is nearest."

"You must sing that to Mrs. Erskine," said Georgy, when Mrs. Everett had finished a recitative of her own, half-singing, half-acting.

"Why?"

"Because she has such an admiration for your acting."

"Does she think I am clever?" asked Constance,

as simply and anxiously as if it were a questionable fact.

“Who would not?—Is the idea a new one?”

Like admiration as she might, she yet was not fully aware of her own resources; there was genius in her nature, and she hardly knew it. It was not one of her least winning characteristics, her sensitiveness to praise, and her genuine respect and gratitude for it, coming even from those who were not her equals, but whom it pleased her sincerely to rank as above her in capacity.

“Dear Mrs. Erskine,” said Georgy, when the rest of the party were sitting in the drawing-room, “you shall not wear that gown any longer.”

They had all abused the gown, and every one was united in endeavouring to put her out of conceit with it.

“Why, what does the colour of my gowns signify? I’m an old woman, and have no husband to please: you all care far too much about dress, young women.”

“Do you think that one can be well dressed without any effort of one’s own—without bestowing any thought upon the subject?—I wish that it were possible,” answered Georgy.

“No, you don’t, any of you; for what would your occupation be?”

“Indeed,” said Mrs. Lewis, “I should like to set

up an elaborate defence for woman's love of dress ; I think it is natural and becoming. I used really to act upon the principle of indifference far more than I do now ; but my lofty theories concerning trifles have faded away, and I don't much believe even in woman's mission to set man's world right."

"My dear, nobody asks you to believe in such a thing. I had rather that you spent all day dressing yourself, than fall into such a dreary enthusiasm."

"But, Constance," said Mrs. Lewis again, who was always drawn out by her friend's neighbourhood, and who was half-laughing, half-serious,—“Do you know, I think nothing would teach a woman love of dress more than love for a clever man ; which, you know, ought to raise one."

"Oh ! love for any man would, I suppose : but perhaps your instance is especially right."

"I think," Mrs. Lewis went on, rather eagerly ; "I think, that a woman never feels her own littleness so much as by the side of a man, and he (at first) would forgive a crime more quickly than any ungracefulness in a woman."

"Of course, we are taught that it is our business to please ; small blame to us if we follow it up," laughed Constance.

"Dress *does* make a difference ; and when women who have intellect learn that they must give way

before a pretty woman, I think it is natural that the mania of dress should possess them."

"You come out very eloquently upon 'l'évangile de la toilette,'" said Constance: "I did not know how well you could advocate the cause; and, after all, a great lack of beauty is a misfortune in a woman. Only, there is one thing that I often feel: if intellect avails a woman almost nothing in the battle of love, goodness is of itself more worth to *her* than, than to a man."

"You think so?"

"Yes, indeed, I do," she repeated. "In a man's earliest dreams of perfection, goodness and beauty go hand in hand; a woman dreams of goodness as a matter of course, but it is not always on that her fancy dwells with the utmost complacency, but on strength and intellect. What crime would we not forgive sooner than cowardice?"

"My dear, I should be sorry if there were no goodness in the world," exclaimed Mrs. Erskine.

"No, no; I was not saying that, but simply that goodness does not hold so prominent a place in a woman's first ideal as in a man's: a very faulty and undisciplined ideal you may say, but it is true for all that."

"Well, you are right in a way, certainly; I cannot deny it."

"I think we might be allowed to care for dress.

I do not know that any other passion is lawful to womankind," said Margaret, flippantly, returning to the charge.

"Only one other; the love of children," said Constance, in a tone of unaffected regret.

"Children, yes;" and Margaret's harsh manner changed: when she spoke of children, she was always at her best.


"How differently people wish for children," said Constance, who was never at a loss for a theory. "Some through the pure instinct of maternity, and others often only through their devotion to another: they wish—they wish, in short, to be the mother of Cæsar's children; and the two feelings, one of devotion to Cæsar and the other of abstract maternity, are not the same."

They laughed at Constance's illustration.

"Mrs. Everett quoting Cæsar. Ah! she really knows about everything," chimed in Mr. Lewis, who had just entered the room; and they all laughed more.

Margaret and Constance still sat talking, working the allegory of Cæsar's wife, &c., and imagining wonderful situations, which happily are never (all at least) accumulated in the destiny of one unfortunate.


Margaret grew melancholy, making, as the French books would say, "a return upon herself." Georgy



thought how different Margaret must have been before she grew bitter, and became Mrs. Lewis. "When she was in love with Cæsar, for instance;" when she was legitimately sentimental, and did not live on the lukewarm remnants of her feelings. It sometimes strikes one that such fare must be insipid. Those who partake of it do not always follow the natural law of progression from word to deed; which must make the course all the more vapid. They do not take the comfort which sentiment and the French books might perhaps suggest at last; but they are excellent people, and fulfil all the duties of their station.

Mrs. Lewis was in reality a good woman, so with what she liked our private taste need not interfere.

Georgy's reflection was, that matrimony had wrought this change in her. "Why could not Margaret, too, have married a Mr. Erskine?" Such a marriage as that would have been Georgy's panacea for all disappointments; and she felt guilty as she thought of the superiority of her lot over that of all other women.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE next morning Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. Lumsden were talking in the drawing-room, and Georgy was idly turning over some books: she was not interested in their conversation, but startled at the words.

“And will Jim Erskine take upon himself to comfort pretty Constance Everett, do you think? She would be a capital match for him now.”

“These are early times to speculate, and a poor woman should be allowed breathing-time before she rushes a second time into matrimony.”

So they chatted on, and in a short time James and Constance were dismissed. Georgy was greedily scanning a past of which she knew nothing.

“Whom had he loved in his life? More than one person, perhaps. Perhaps! oh! of course, and she was for nothing in all that past.”

But she still confided in her happiness; still felt so secure, that even that name of Constance gave her no real uneasiness.

The next morning Mrs. Erskine went suddenly to Edinburgh, for she had received permission to see

her daughter; and Georgy was disappointed to think that she would not yet meet the mother and the son together, and be set thoroughly at ease.

Letters and luncheon came that day as usual: there were letters for every one; an angry letter from Mr. Sandon, who still refused a reconciliation with Georgy, and another for her from Mr. Erskine, which very soon effaced all recollection of the former. Mrs. Everett had two letters also—one was from Miss Stanley; for Sir Hugh had persecuted his sister into corresponding with Mrs. Everett. The good girl complied, and her periodical effusions were rather a demand upon patience, if thought to require an answer.

Miss Stanley asked Mrs. Everett what she was reading, and named the books which she herself had just finished, stating, moreover, that the books in their club were at present very uninteresting. But Constance, I am sorry to say, did not quite finish the letter; she turned uneasily to the other, which was in her own straight, delicate handwriting: a foreign letter returned to her from *Bruzelles*.

A short time after the death of her husband, Constance had written again to James Erskine, in answer to his cold, business-like note. Her letter was not cold, for she sincerely repented of her fit of anger against him, and wished to make amends. The letter had never reached him, and Constance,

receiving no answer, had once again tried to nurse herself into an angry fit; but she had never perhaps regretted him more than now, when she had lost her hold upon him. This was the letter now returned.

She looked at it, and then a deep shade of vexation passed quickly over her face. She was terribly vexed and discomposed: she seemed as if she could hardly refrain from explaining to some one the cause of her disappointment, and yet she did not speak. She put the letter into her pocket, and began at last to eat her luncheon with a melancholy defiant air: the other letter lay unheeded by her side. Just then, Sir Hugh and his sister were well nigh forgotten; and yet a brilliant position was before her, an immense fortune, with all the pleasure and display which she had ever coveted. She would surely take all this, with so handsome and amiable a man as Sir Hugh, and one who was so completely at her beck. Many of her friends would have thought it no hard task to accept him without these appurtenances. Luncheon was not yet finished ere another incident occurred: Algernon, the eldest boy of Mrs. Lewis, appeared:—

“Ma! there’s been such a smash on the railroad, and all the people’s killed.”

“Algy, child, what do you mean?”

“Thomas says, ‘all the people’s killed:’ they must be, if Thomas says so.”

"Algy, child!" exclaimed Mrs. Lewis, quickly.

How much longer Algy would have tantalized them was uncertain; he was no lucid expositor, and was dreadfully confused about the matter himself.


Thomas arrived, and explained how a telegraphic message of a dreadful accident had reached Eastham. The butcher had just brought the news; he was in Eastham when it arrived at twelve o'clock, and now it was near three.

"Of course, they always make the worst of such a thing," said Margaret, quietly; but she looked very grave. That train ought to bring her husband, who had been at D——, horse-dealing, Mr. Erskine, and Captain James, another guest of Mr. Lewis's. One could not get much out of Thomas or the butcher. At the station near Millthorpe Grange, they knew nothing, and Mrs. Lewis must either wait patiently, or send all the way to Eastham in the hope of hearing more.

"Many people had been killed," Thomas said; "he couldn't say how many: he did not believe the telegraph knew."

Margaret looked grave, but she admitted no gloomy possibilities, and silenced everybody who got frightened, though appearing very much so herself.

Georgy was quiet also: she was not easily upset; but she wished that the evening would come as she never had wished for any evening before.



Everybody had an indistinct idea of going to the station, only that as yet it would be too early. By-and-by, Georgy went up-stairs, and in going to her own room she passed Mrs. Everett's. The door was open, and a voice asked,

"Who is there?"

Constance was lying on the sofa with her face against the cushion.

"Georgy, Georgy; oh! let us go to the station."

"No, not now; it would be useless; but we will later."

"If this day would only pass! Oh! Georgy, I shall go mad with waiting."

It was no use reasoning with Constance; she had killed Mr. Erskine over and over again in her imagination, and would not be gainsaid.

There was a common feeling between them: an unconscious sympathy, which neither acknowledged nor defined. It was partly chance, partly some secret attraction, which drew them together on that afternoon.

"He was the truest, kindest friend I ever had," said Constance. "It was only to-day that I discovered my mistake; and the thought that it is too late now, perhaps, makes me mad: I cannot bear it."

And she talked on with singular lucidity for a woman on the verge of madness. She positively

needed some one to talk to; and that day she poured forth her whole heart, and Georgy saw her as she was: as she was made; not as the world and its influence had made her.

It was another and still prettier Constance that she saw—true, tender—as she talked of past days. Her feeling not too deep to find expression, even then, as she heaped loving praise upon James Erskine, and depreciated herself: no child in a fit of repentance was ever more sincere. She praised him, and talked of him as he deserved, Georgy thought, and had found the words which she herself needed.

“Constance had misunderstood him, and now her letter was returned to her.” Constance did not say upon what occasion she had written to him, and did not appear willing to explain. Georgy began to listen with a very new feeling and a very new dread. She could not ask what Mrs. Everett was not inclined to tell, and who else was she to ask? Shyness, and some feeling that it would raise up a barrier between them, made the announcement of the relation in which she stood to Mr. Erskine almost impossible. She could not begin. Besides, she must know more; it was her right.

The afternoon was passing, and they still sat together. Constance, too full of her own impressions to observe Georgy, who, besides, was not demonstrative.

Then Georgy quieted herself with the thought that surely her life and treasure lay too deep for Constance to touch it; and yet she half thought that, always excepting a railroad, there might be other places more desirable for James than the vicinity of Mrs. Everett.

It was only a half reflection, though; for she deemed that her possession could never pass from her.

"We will go now," she said, when the clock had struck four; "they may come by the five o'clock train." Constance had grown happier again, and she still anticipated the possibility of meeting James Erskine alive. Georgy was glad to go, and glad of a companion as an excuse. They went down-stairs together; and Constance, as she opened the door, turned round, and leaning her forehead against Georgy for a moment, kissed her sadly and tenderly. It was the only time she had ever done so, and long afterwards Georgy was glad to remember it. When they came down-stairs, they found the other two ladies going to the station likewise. And so as a flock of sheep, one going because the others were, they all set off.

"Constance would be tired," Mrs. Lewis said, "so she should ride the children's pony." That was soon settled, and the others walked. Their half-hour's walk seemed long that evening; no one talked but

Mrs. Lumsden, who rather wished for the excitement of having some one to be anxious for, and who strove to create for herself a fictitious interest, by displaying more feeling than anybody else; and then she was wretched about Jim Erskine.

The train was late, of course. Possibly it had been run into by some other ill-disposed train. Possibly: all the people at the station took it coolly. They displayed a little decent feeling concerning the safety of Mr. Lewis, as being proprietor of Millthorpe Grange, but none concerning the other gentlemen.

"If Mr. Lewis had taken any harm, he would surely have sent word," and the station-master viewed the matter cheerfully.

Margaret insisted at last upon their returning, and she being resolute, they all acquiesced. Constance was on the pony again, when a whistle was heard at length. "She's coming now," said the man, touching his hat.

Yes, at last. Constance pulled the pony, and the pony pranced. "Oh, don't!—Stop!" she cried, and when she stopped pulling, it stopped prancing. There was Mr. Lewis uninjured, with a cigar in his mouth, on the platform in an instant—and Mr. Erskine, too. That gentleman got out likewise with his full complement of arms and legs, and threw away the end of his cigar. The other gentlemen

seemed drowsy, and had probably been asleep. They looked so blissfully unconscious of all the anxiety which they had caused, and were so placidly surprised at seeing the ladies there, that it was quite ludicrous.

Except Constance, who was on her pony outside the platform, they all began to laugh. It was rather vexatious to have spent so much feeling upon the ghost of a danger, as far as concerned them.

There had indeed been a frightful accident, but it had befallen an earlier train than that by which they had started, and they had been delayed; that was all.

This explanation was soon given, and Constance was still on the pony at the gate, whilst the other three ladies stood upon the platform. No one noticed her whilst the first greetings were exchanged; and Mr. Erskine, who was shaking hands with Georgy for the second time, suddenly recognised her, as an imploring "Don't! oh, stop!" addressed indifferently to the pony or the train, startled them. The pony, though a child's pony, was anything but quiet, and, grown fidgety with waiting, reared—"stood up on end," as Algy said: which he enjoyed, but which ladies naturally did not. Mrs. Everett was easily unseated, and was thrown.

Mrs. Lumsden screamed out, "She's killed!"

Several people rushed to catch the pony, and Mr. Lumsden ran to lift up Constance.

She was really hurt, and only said, "Don't, for Heaven's sake! you hurt me so: let me lie still a little," and she insisted upon remaining in a very swampy ditch.

"I am rather awkward at lifting people," said Mr. Lewis, apologetically; "but indeed it is out of the question your remaining here; I assure you it is: Erskine can manage to lift you, perhaps."

And Mr. Erskine lifted her without help.

"You can carry her to Alice Cairn's cottage, can't you?" said Mr. Lewis.

"I'm sure you can't," said Constance, drawing a deep breath. "You'll never be able—I can walk presently."

His face flushed for a moment, and he pressed his lips together—a common habit of his; and although Constance seemed to think that it was difficult, he carried her with great ease to the cottage—a stone's throw from the little station.

Her bonnet fell off as they reached the door, and when they entered, he laid her on the bed.

"Oh! thank you, James," she said, as if she had parted from him only yesterday—just as if she did not bear within herself the knowledge of her heartless behaviour; just as if—as if he was her friend, and "Thank you, James," was the most natural of phrases.

He compressed his lips again, and faltered out,

"Mrs. Everett, thank Heaven, you are not hurt," and then drew back from the bedside.

Every one came into the one-roomed cottage, and then fidgeted out again, thinking that they were not wanted. Constance said that she was not much hurt, only her ankle sprained, and her head and shoulder bruised. She should be quite well presently, and would go back directly the pony carriage—which had been sent for—arrived.

Mr. Erskine came in to announce it. Mr. Lewis was standing by the fireplace, and Mrs. Lewis and Georgy were sitting by the bed.

"Now, then," said Mr. Lewis.

"Let me go," said Constance.

Something in James Erskine's manner annoyed her, and, half-angry with him for standing still without once offering to help her, she started up.

"Now you really had much better be carried," said Mr. Lewis.

And then Mr. Erskine insisted upon helping her. She would not be carried, however, and limped along to the carriage. Mr. Erskine lifted her in, and Georgy could not help watching his face; he looked, she thought, as if something provoked and annoyed him, but that was all.

Mr. Lewis drove Constance, and the rest of the party walked, all carrying on a general conversation. Mr. Erskine talked unceasingly. He was glad to

see Georgy, if one may so say, with the uppermost part of his feelings; but those which lay under all were seized upon by earlier reminiscences. Perhaps he remembered how he had once carried Constance (no, not Constance: he never called her so then; it was long ago, before her marriage). Perhaps he saw in his mind's eye a party of people by the water's side; he remembered how one had fallen down the steep bank, and how he had carried her up again. If all that day could have been spent so, carrying a lady up and down a steep bank, I wonder if he would have thought it long!

There had been one of those short flirtations between them, which are chronicled only in the records kept by mothers and all elderly ladies. They mean nothing, and come to nothing—nothing to one of the persons concerned, a great deal to the other sometimes.

A young Mr. Erskine had once very much admired Constance Gordon, and had he passed but one or two days more in her company, would have declared his love for her. Miss Gordon's aunt, however, had watched the two. Mr. Erskine was, in her opinion, no desirable match for Constance, and a timely departure had put a stop to the acquaintance.

Miss Gordon soon forgot, or rather she had never remembered. A short time after that she married.

So much had happened since then, that this flirtation might well be classed amongst the things of long ago. Perhaps, too, the reminiscence borrowed half its attraction from the knowledge that he was then younger.

How many things we look back tenderly upon, simply for that reason.

The evening was a short one, for they dined late. Constance appeared, and both she and Mr. Erskine were very glad to see each other. Both knew admirably how to behave themselves, and both could conceal their real feelings as well as most people who inhabit drawing-rooms. Mrs. Everett's demeanour was perfect, and Mr. Erskine's a shade stiffer than Georgy had ever before noticed in him. Mrs. Everett and Mrs. Lumsden had gone up-stairs, Mrs. Lewis was still lingering in the drawing-room, and Mr. Erskine was dutifully lighting Miss Sandon's candle in the library. She had not quite felt till that moment that he was his former self again.

"I did not expect that you would have come so soon," she said.

"I worked hard, and so got away: I am tired now. What have you been doing with yourself all these days?"

"We have led a very quiet life; tell me what *you* have been doing?"

"Look here; this is what you said you would

have; it is your own fault for not choosing a handsomer thing," and he gave her a heart and cross of massed turquoise.

"It is a beautiful thing; I would not have had anything else; this is my especial fancy: turquoises have been my desire from a child, and I thought that I should be happy the day I possessed some."

"Well! are you?"

"Yes, I am," she answered, looking quickly up at him.

"Let me put it on for you; it is pretty, though I don't think so much of its magnificence as you do."

"People who say that they are poor, have no right to magnificence," she answered, laughing.

"I *am* poor, in very earnest," he said, sadly. "How will you like being poor, little Georgy?"

She did not realize his poverty: the pretty house where Mrs. Erskine lived, had been to her the type of London magnificence.

"I never remember that you are poor," was her answer. "It seems to me that all you wish for must come to you, and that you will be sure to grow rich some day."

"I wish it seemed so to me: but how will *you* like the poverty which is all that I can give you?"

"I! I have never had much; naturally I cannot feel it: it is you who will mind the change."

"No, not at all, dear."

"Good night! and do give me my candle."

"No, don't go so quickly," he said, with a half sigh, as if her going involved some serious misfortune: "Don't go. What is that book you have hidden under the sofa-cushion? In Heaven's name, what makes you read law?" he asked, very much amused, as he took it out of its abode.

"Because ——; but why do you want to know? What business have you to meddle with my books?"

"How many cases are you up in?" he returned, smiling.


"That is no affair of yours: I may have many friends in the law for ought you know."

"How many?" he asked, with his quiet laugh, and a droll expression of man's vanity upon his face.

He contrived sometimes to give a momentary expression of vanity entirely apart from conceit; it was in him a sort of love of approbation, which rather gave confidence to others and drew them nearer, than had any of the hard, dry, self-satisfaction of other people's vanity.

"How many? One, perhaps; and I read it because ——, because I thought that you read it. It is stupid, though, and if you are not better than your ——"

"Merciful Heaven! don't impute the collective stupidity or wisdom of judicial England to me, if you please."



"Good night; and give me my candle."

"I wanted to talk to you about so many things."

"To-morrow, if you like."

"No, no; don't go yet, my child; stay and talk to me a little. Georgy, *do* you love me?"

She turned round, and her face changed and crimsoned; her whole quiet calm demeanour was gone in an instant: you could not tell how, for she had not spoken.

"Georgy, tell me! I feel so old and sad to-night, I want to extort a gracious speech from you," and he laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"*Do* I love you!" she whispered back, and by a sudden movement bent towards him, and threw her arms round his neck. "You know I do: Oh, my God! I should die if you forgot me."

"Georgy, child!"

"Good night, James! Mrs. Lewis will come, and I *must* go."

"Good night, my darling."

A whole edifice of doubts had vanished from Georgy's mind that night. Questions actually framed, and boldly asked in the jealousy of solitude, had vanished from her mind: and besides, she was far too shy to ask them really. To look at him, and to think of him, was still a certificate of happiness.

Mr. Erskine was in the library when Mrs. Lewis

passed through; he decorously lit her candle, and presently his own. There was a strange confusion in his mind that night. Constance and Georgy were most inextricably blended together. He had firmly believed that to meet the former would have been to him a matter of the utmost indifference. He had cared for her once very much, but he had never thought that he should feel so much at seeing her again. And he looked back sadly to that once—then drew closer to the recollection of Georgy. He was in a state of mental polygamy just then: wherein many an impulsive nature may find itself.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE next day Mr. Erskine decided that he had best go to Edinburgh immediately, meet his mother, and break his engagement to her.

He went up-stairs to Mrs. Lewis's sitting-room, hoping that he should there find Georgy. Instead, he found Mrs. Everett, who had not appeared that morning. She was lying on the sofa, with her foot upon a cushion, and a bright, feverish colour in her cheeks. Not having seen her that morning, he could not be so ill-mannered as to retreat.

"James," she said, quickly.

It would only have been ridiculous had he remained stiff and formal, so he was compelled to call her by her name.

"I am very happy that you are convalescent, Constance," and he stood by the table, without sitting down; which would have involved too long a stay.

He was not going to begin; Constance saw that, and for the first time in her life she must make amends, and must abandon the position of an injured person.

"You must forgive me, James," she said, softly, and holding out her hand. "You have left me ages without a letter from you, and I never knew till yesterday how much to blame you must have thought me."

"My dear Mrs. Everett, pardon me," he answered, very deferentially, but very haughtily. "It is I who was to blame, and I have long felt it: I should have asked your pardon before, and I do so now most heartily: you are very good to have forgotten and forgiven."

She felt the irony of his words; he had never been ironical before to her, and she had never valued her power over him so much as now that it was passing from her.

"Do not talk so!" she said, quickly and impatiently; "I know you are angry with me quite well: I was angry with you, too. You should not have doubted me so: how could you ever think that I cared for that handsomest and good naturedest of good boys, Sir Hugh Stanley?—It was an insult to me;" and she looked proudly up at him with the old winning expression, which, change as she might, had never changed.

She took him aback, and all those imaginary faults wherewith he had invested her, were strangely melting away already.

"You made me angry," she said:—"I was so

wretched then. I think you really must have been anxious to find a quarrel, when you sought out such a cause."

"I was not aware that we had quarrelled. Good-bye, Constance: you must forgive me for running away so quickly this morning; and you must promise to forgive me all my past misdemeanours, whatever they may have been, for they were not committed purposely."

He spoke carelessly; but with a deeper pain underneath than she knew of.

"I am going to Edinburgh to-day."

"Going, and for how long?"

"I hardly know." He was inwardly purposed not to return till she was gone.

He shook hands, and was about to leave the room, when Constance started up, surprised and mortified. She was always accustomed to have her way, and to act upon the impulse of the moment.

"James, James, come back! I want to speak to you." He turned back, and she stood before him, her old former self.

She wanted to speak, and could not find utterance for her words. She had an eager way of gesticulating sometimes, when she was explaining or asking anything: she half-clenched her hand as she stretched it out;—she did so now without speaking, and stood for a moment with her old, imperious look, and then

fairly burst into a shower of tears, hiding her face in her hands.

“Constance, for Heaven’s sake do not cry so!—Constance! Constance! you will drive me frantic!”—and all those faults before-mentioned seemed suddenly accumulated upon his own head.

Constance threw him the letter which he ought to have received so long ago, yet had not, and then sat down again in the window, leaning her head upon her hand. It was a brave thing to do, to give a six months old letter back to be read without a word of alteration: most people would have written him another, or explained by word of mouth. Who likes to look at a letter written under the influence of excited feelings six months ago? He read the letter through. It was of a different tone from those that Constance had ever written to him before.

He had read it through, and then stood watching her from the other end of the room. This was his doing—his madness: he had loved her always; he loved her now. He could not tell why. The Frenchman’s praise of the woman whom he loved has seldom been surpassed. He did not say that she was fairer or wiser than all other women: he described her negatively first—she was not this, she was not that, “*Mais, elle était mieux femme que les autres.*” It was thus that James Erskine thought of Constance: he had forgotten all her perfections,

and only remembered that she was best. There were other fair women in the world; other loving ones; but for him, "*elle était mieux femme que les autres.*"

That was all—and he must love her still. Last night it was the thought of Constance that animated his tenderness to Georgy. Is the bitter saying really true? "*Toujours nous nous vengeons sur ceux qui nous aiment, de ceux que nous avons aimés.*" Now he had wilfully lost her. Never fear Constance that your power is past! But it is too late now—a man cannot break his word as a woman does: in that matter, verily, is man's law stricter than woman's. "Good-bye, Constance," he said, without moving, and then the rest of his sentence failed him: he was so prostrate at the discovery of his hasty judgment; and the satisfaction of feeling that she for the first time bent to him, was now only an additional sting.

"It was my fault; but if my evil fate had not led me away from Bruxelles so soon, I should not have fancied—yes, it was my fault," he continued, very sadly; "but you will forgive me: I shall always be your friend, and I will never doubt you in anything again. Good-bye, good-bye, Constance!"

She looked up, startled by his strange manner, which seemed to imply a leave-taking; a tear was still upon her face, and he was standing near her

with the letter in his hand, when Georgy came quietly into the room. Both started; Georgy's first impulse was to look at them fixedly, and then she turned to leave the room. Mr. Erskine did that, however, going hastily down-stairs, and muttering something which was totally inaudible. Constance brushed away the tear, and leant against the window; then came back to the sofa again.

"What is the matter with him?" she asked, abruptly.

"With whom?"


"James Erskine! Is he going to be married? or is he ruined? I know him so well. Why is he so sad?"

"Sad? Mrs. Everett!"

"Yes; Georgy, I know him so well: I wonder what it is! If he is going to be married, it rather weighs upon his heart." She went on with anxious vehemence.

Georgy did not speak: she could not; but looked at Mrs. Everett so keenly that Constance coloured. Just then Mrs. Lewis came in.

Georgy was in a state of bewilderment all that day. She said over their story to herself. She could read it. And why had she not done so before? Their looks and the letter told enough. They had both looked actually guilty when she entered. There were many other little things which




she strung together quickly, and her fancy could fill up the rest.

She was not surprised, after having reflected a little. It was very natural that her nature should not be enough for his: that appeared quite just, and she never questioned it; there was nothing left, then, but to free him quickly, leaving him with as little knowledge as possible that he had caused her suffering.

How strange all the people in the house were to her! But it did not matter much, for she was so unused to companionship, that to no person could one word of the bitter protest which was in her heart have been spoken. The oppression of a dream, when one cannot speak or cry out, was upon her, waking. And then she wondered dimly why her fate was so different from that of others. Her life had been so lonely that it had changed her, and she was old; yet still with a repining feeling left that she had never well been young.

She must act, though, now—that was something. She would go away calmly, with no parade of self-sacrifice. She was not heroic in any abstract way: the days were long past when she had nursed dreams of devotion and enthusiasm for their own sakes: but for any one whom she loved, she would have died quietly, without expecting that her fate could



affect them much, and without asking a word of recognition from any other human being.

Mr. Erskine did not go to Edinburgh that day; but he set forth upon a solitary walk. They say that even remorse may be walked down; perhaps he thought that love might. It was too late now, and he could only avoid the sight of Constance as much as possible. Hitherto those whom he loved had repaid him fully; and, truly, well they might. He was too busy and energetic ever to find time to deem himself ill-used; and however hard his fate might have been, I believe that he would still have compelled Fortune to deal fairly with him at last, through his own efforts, and by never admitting that she had used him foully.

All through that walk he deified Constance and mistrusted her by turns, till every phase of thought on that subject was exhausted. How many times did he see Constance fall that day? And how often did he hold her in his arms? He dwelt on all that till it became an intoxication which it was dangerous to remember, and there was nothing for it now but to forget.

He liked Georgy exceedingly, poor child! and only yesterday he believed that he was in love with her.

The party that evening was diminished by the loss of Mrs. Everett, who had a nervous headache, and, feeling very ill, preferred remaining in her room.

Mr. Erskine, who had not seen Georgy all day, was more outwardly attentive to her than he had ever been before. No thought of escaping from his engagement had ever entered his mind, and he was fully bent upon arranging all things quickly. Georgy watched him intently; she saw how absent he was, and how really constrained; and every moment she felt only more certain that she was right.

After dinner, Mrs. Lumsden startled her from thoughtfulness by a sharp inquiry after Constance, whom she did not much like. Her profession was society, and she had not the wisdom to yield up at once the palm of superiority to Constance.

"How is Mrs. Everett?—she is always ill, I think, when it suits her convenience."

"Why?"

"I am sure that she has quarrelled with Jim Erskine."

"Do you think so," said Georgy, drily.

"Yes, because he looks gloomy to-day, and because it requires no very great wisdom to tell that he worships the ground on which she treads."

Georgy felt so angry: enough that it should be so, without being told of it by Mrs. Lumsden, who seemed to be guilty of some great profanity by commenting upon James. But the remorseless lady, who knew no respect of persons, went on in the same way.

"I think she hardly feels the value of a heart

which is wholly hers: it is a great treasure to possess, and a deep responsibility. Of all people, I ought to know it best, for no heart was ever so wholly another's, I think, as my husband's, and it almost startles me sometimes to think of it."

Mrs. Lumsden was perfectly ready to accept anybody else's heart, but always prudently sheltered herself from observation by professing openly a deep passion for her husband. Georgy was glad of the turn in the conversation, and hoped that this account of her husband's heart would continue; but no, she returned to the other two. "He looked awkward when he met her yesterday at the station. I think they have quarrelled, and when people do that they must needs have made some progress together. Oh, for youth and love!—

"*Quand la vie une fois a perdu son erreur,
Quand elle ne ment plus, c'en est fait du bonheur,*"

she said, repeating Lamartine's verses.

There was a mixture of slang and sentiment about Mrs. Lumsden, which at any other time would very much have amused Georgy, as she watched the lady, who had taken up a French novel, and was carelessly dipping into it. But just then she could not be amused: Mrs. Lumsden and the book which she held in her hand were both an exquisite satire upon

The empty-headed, empty-hearted woman,
her jargon of sentiment, and her familiar use of

words: words of which she never knew, could never learn the true meaning; and the book, which was as much beyond her, as it lay far from Georgy, then. It was one of those stories in which French literature stands pre-eminent. A wonderful analysis of passion, such as it were better perhaps had never been written and never felt.

To have written that book, the feeling must have been past, and (as the phrase is) the author's experiences been *exploitées* for the work.

The book in its cold-blooded consciousness, and the lady in her unconsciousness, were both equally repulsive to Georgy.

Presently she looked up: "I know that they will ask me to sing; will you accompany me, my dear Miss Sandon?"

Mrs. Everett being up-stairs, they *must* listen to her.

Georgy was thankful for something to do; and when the gentlemen came in, Mrs. Lumsden sang. Mr. Erskine stood by the pianoforte, but did not hear much of the song; afterwards he insisted upon Georgy's playing, and was nearly as oblivious of that as of the former piece.

The evening passed on quietly, till the ladies rose to go. James was absently looking at a newspaper; he mechanically looked up, and as his eyes met Georgy's, he smiled with his tender, kind expression.

It made her heart leap: and yet she saw how mechanical the action was.

"He would always be good to me," she thought, vacantly,—“always, whatever happened,”—it was no fear of that which made her give him up.

Everybody said good-night: he did not look particularly at her again, and they all separated.

Georgy went into Mrs. Everett's room, who started up from her bed, declaring that she felt very ill, and then forgot her sufferings in the inquiry,—“What everybody had done down-stairs?—What Mrs. Lumsden had sung?”—She asked everything before she came to “What had James Erskine done?—Had he asked after her?”

“Yes;” Georgy could answer satisfactorily on that point.

“Why, he was going away to-day, I thought!—What stopped him?”

Georgy did not know—she, too, had mentally asked that question.

“Georgy, that is a pretty dress; but your hair is scandalously arranged—I must make the bands stick out more,”—and she stretched her white arms out of bed, and began to pull down Georgy's hair.

“There, now it is better: you will have a great
some day, when you go forth a little and see
old.”

“One ever found that out but you.”

"Nonsense!" she answered good-naturedly. "More people than I have, I assure you: James Erskine told me once how much he liked you; is he not worth while pleasing?"

"You think so," she answered, coldly.

Those last words had crushed her: they told better the measure of his liking, and made her feel her position more thoroughly than the most elaborate explanation could have done. So Constance was not even jealous of her; she was entirely without consequence, that was all.

"I will go now, for you must be tired."

"Give me some more eau-de-Cologne first; and stay a minute longer—do—I cannot rest."

"You must go to sleep."

"I cannot; I am anxious and unhappy, too, I believe."

"Why?—Tell me about it."

"Oh! nothing—nothing—that is the answer which one always gives, whatever is the matter with one. Georgy, a position is not all one needs in life. I used sometimes to think so; but now I am sick at heart, and shall never wish for such a thing again." Georgy could have made Mrs. Everett talk if she had wished it, but she did not. She had not the courage and self-control requisite for listening.

"You must go to sleep now, or you will fall sick in earnest."

Constance turned round quickly, and laid her head upon the pillow; Georgy saw that her eyes were full of tears. She spoke once or twice more, in a disjointed way, and then really did fall asleep. Georgy watched her, then walked to the table, and looked at the luxurious nothings with which it was strewed. At any other time the sight would have pleased her; now she only remembered they were fitting appurtenances for one such as Mrs. Everett.

Her embroidered handkerchief, and a bracelet, some books, and two little embossed caskets: how long afterwards she remembered them! The book she took up was one which she had often heard Mr. Erskine quote: everything there seemed to hurt her. She went back to the bed, and wondered, as she looked at Mrs. Everett, if the secret influence of what was to be, had drawn her so often towards one so utterly dissimilar to herself. She had never foreboded it, never dreamt of it for a moment; there was to her a want in Constance Everett's nature which she felt instinctively, from the first moment she had ever seen her: she never doubted but that, with all his appreciation of her charms, James Erskine must have felt it too.

When she had stood by the bed for a moment or two, she went softly back to her own room, and to her thoughts. She loved him so that she durst not consider how great that love was: she had best draw

back from such considerations now. How few were the days she had been with him in reality, how many she had passed in thought!

Now, one had stepped down before her and taken from her the waters of life.—Done it so lightly—so carelessly. No existence hung for *her* upon the gain. Why had she taken *that*?—Could there be no exchange?—Would no anguish wring it from each one's appointed destiny?—She could never know one such hour as this.—Let her have all—all the pride and glory of life—but not the lover—no, not that:—and she whispered to herself, “no, not that,” as if there was some saving help in the intensity of her volition.

What was partly the truth sneered back at her terribly, increased by the retrospect. He had not loved her; but she him. She fancied that every look and word on her part had declared it. The meaning and appearance of a thousand things suddenly changed—and her morbid fancy charged her with much that had never been committed.

Go back, fool! and look at her again as she lies asleep!—She will be his wife—not you!

Yours was a selfish, reckless passion; unasked, unsought: you first rushed into it, and for long you forgot that there was other suffering but yours in the world.—Remember it now, and bear yours as you may.

The religion of past days, which returned reproachfully to you in your happiness, call upon it now, as it is the wont of men to do when their earthly treasure is lost.

The same thoughts went wandering up and down her brain, so clearly, so sharply defined, that they hardly seemed suggested by herself, but by some external agency.

In the morning, the revulsion from all great excitement was upon her, and she felt very tired, both mentally and bodily. The morning had come with its usual routine of eating, drinking, and talking; and Georgy went down, hoping that her appearance was not at all different from that of other days.

She had written two or three letters to James Erskine, which had been almost her whole night's occupation. The last was unfortunately not sealed; and to look over one's own letter next day, on even a trifling affair, is always a trial: so this one was torn up like its predecessors. She would write a very short note: that was best; but before even that best and shortest was finished, she heard the breakfast bell, and went down-stairs. Every one was there except Mrs. Everett; Mr. Erskine sat by Georgy, and was particularly attentive to her whilst she answered him at random.

"Mr. Erskine," said she abruptly, when breakfast

was ended, "will you come?—I mean—I want to speak to you for a few minutes."

"Yes, I will come wherever you please."

She walked up-stairs to Mrs. Lewis's sitting-room, and he followed her. When they were there, her heart sank, and she was startled at her own rashness; she knew neither what to say nor do.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

She hesitated for a moment: James seemed already gone; and when she had spoken, he, as he stood there, would be lost to her for ever.

"It was about you, not about myself, that I wanted to speak. I do not think you are very happy; but I am glad that Mrs. Everett's letter, which ought to have reached you long ago, has done so now."

"What do you mean?" he asked, stiffly.

"I mean that you have had a misunderstanding with Mrs. Everett; it has been cleared up now, I think, and almost too late."

"Georgy," he said, quickly, "that is not right—not fair. I hope that you do not mean to treat me often so: it is very early to be jealous."

"No, I am not jealous; but it would be unkind of me to marry you, for I know who it is that you might love best," she answered, in a low voice, and timidly.

If she had been playing a game, she could not

perhaps have attached him more closely to her ; for he was too proud, too honourable, not to recoil from all idea of catching at her words to free himself.

"Georgy," he said, smiling with his lips, but not his eyes, "you are mistaken, and need not be afraid of accomplishing my unhappiness: tell me what you know about a letter of Mrs. Everett's, which seems to have made such an impression upon you."

He spoke rather hurriedly, and she answered, gaining composure as he lost his :

"I know you fancied that Mrs. Everett had quarrelled with you, because you did not receive a letter which she wrote to you at Bruxelles; and I know how the knowledge that it was a mistake has changed you in spite of yourself; and I know how Mrs. Everett ——" and she paused.

"How Mrs. Everett, what?" he echoed, inadvertently betraying some curiosity.

"How Mrs. Everett cares for you," she said, abruptly. "Now, I am going; for I have said what I wanted: you will come and see me some day, and tell me that I was right." Her voice trembled, but she brought out the words deliberately and clearly.

"Georgy, you are mad! This is your doing, not mine."

"And I am right to do it," she said, softly. "I

will not own that I am wrong, till you dare tell me that you have never loved Mrs. Everett."

They had changed places now; and she, in her self-possession, was stronger for the moment. "Tell me, if you do not mind the question, what had Mrs. Everett misunderstood you about?"

"Only that I had remonstrated with her on an imprudent acquaintance; and, after an angry letter which I received from her, I never heard again."

"And you have loved her for long—very long, I know."

He did not deny the assertion, but stood half inclined to speak, and yet uncertain.

"Good-bye," said she, gravely; and she held out her hand.

"No; it is too soon to say good-bye."

"I do not think so: we *must* say that sooner or later, and it had better be now."

"No, Georgy, you must let me talk to you again about this: I will come back soon—I must talk to you;" and he left the room.

Georgy sat there, because he had said that he would return; she had a habit of obeying him, and had not yet forgotten it. Mrs. Lewis came in, but she still remained turning over the leaves of some book; reflecting that she would go back to her aunt's, and wishing that she could start that morning.

It was a good while before Mr. Erskine returned;

and it was not to be wondered at. He had been so surprised at Georgy's sudden words, that he needed a little time to collect himself. He could not be angry, for all she had said was so perfectly true; and yet many people, if they had not availed themselves of her words, and pleaded guilty, would have taken an opposite refuge in displeasure. He was quite collected when he returned, and never for a moment flinched either from the spirit or from the text of his duty to the woman whom he had chosen: but it was only *duty* towards her now. He could not feel the excitement of self-sacrifice which supported her; yet not the less must his be a renunciation. He endeavoured to dissuade her from her purpose; and at last said: "You did surprise me a little while ago; but I think I can satisfy you now. It is quite true that I *have* loved Mrs. Everett very much; but that is past now: I trust in you, or I should not make such a confession. Will you take me as I am, Georgy?" he continued, holding out his hand, and smiling very sweetly. "You are a little jealous and exacting, are you not? I am far older than you, and cannot tell you that I have never loved any one before; I can only promise to love you now: you will be content with that, won't you? You may seek far, my child, before you find such *very* exclusive love as you desire."

She had not taken his hand—had not moved

whilst he was speaking ; now she got up, and leaned against the chimney-piece.

"Thank you—thank you," she said bending down her head, and speaking through her tears ; "I shall always remember what you have just said : you are as good as you are"—and she looked up at him with pride and tenderness. She had forgotten herself just then in the thought of his perfections.

"I used sometimes to ask myself," she went on, as if she were talking to herself, "I knew so little of you really, whether it was your goodness which made me care for you, or whether it was only that you were ——? I know *now* how good you are : I know that you would make me happy, and I am not exacting ; but you see you cannot marry me : you must marry Constance Everett. I know that you will, for she loves you : I am sure of it."

"I do not know that she does."

"But I do ;" and she told him many words of Constance's during the past two days, "Now, are you satisfied at last?"

He coloured deeply, and looked terribly disturbed. There is always something convincing in a man's confusion, which happens so much seldomer than a woman's. His manner changed ; it had been a little stiff before, for he still believed that she had not really given him up ; and he half-admired her, and

was half-angry with her, for what he thought was perhaps only jealousy.

"Georgy, it is you who are good, tender, and thoughtful for me, far beyond what I deserve. Thank you!" he said, kissing both her hands.

Thank you! He had said it, and had accepted her renunciation.

"Good-bye, James!"

"Dear Georgy! shall you always judge and forgive me as you do now?"

"Why not? Is it your fault that you have met Constance Everett again? I am going back to my aunt's in London, and I trust in you to excuse me to Mrs. Erskine for not awaiting her return."

"You are going?"

"Yes, James."

And so she left him. At that moment he suffered far the most: his position was very painful, as he stood there, remorseful, yet unable in anything to atone to Georgy; and grateful, but not knowing how to express his gratitude.


His suffering was of another sort from hers certainly, but not the less was it pain.

James Erskine was not gloomy, or satirical, or romantic, according to one modern type of the hero. And he was not, you will say, as deeply enthusiastic, or as indifferent to this world's prosperity, as some

higher natures are. He had not the glaring faults which often distinguish these ; but he had not their excellencies : he was no hero, neither were any of the people here described. He was only one of the most loveable beings who have ever walked through life. It was a strange chance that had made these two meet, and strangely had Georgy's tenacious nature clung to him.

He was such a contrast to her : she was naturally grave, slow in company, and could do nothing brilliant. She wondered so at his ready power of adaptation, which could answer back to all things, and every description of person, so quickly. She admired his sparkling cleverness, as none other had ever done ; whilst she felt the rest and satisfaction which his deep, true intelligence must give her. Morally and intellectually he had first roused life in her ; and every fault, every weakness (if he had such), was but another link to him. It was not possible that Georgy could have been to him the hundredth part of all this ; and he *did* love Constance : it was at once his condemnation and his excuse.

He was deeply pained at the knowledge of the grief which he must have given Georgy : there was no fatuity in the feeling, for in spite of the world and its influence, he had retained great simplicity of character in many points. He knew her enough



to know that she truly loved him, and it was a knowledge which he had rather have been without. He wrote to her again, and if she would, she could have retracted; but all was over between them. He could make no reparation: any further intercourse which there might ever be between them must be begun by her.

CHAPTER XX.

GEORGY left the Grange that day: to stay longer seemed impossible. James Erskine had gone also, that he might not meet her again, or make her leave the place too quickly. But there was still Mrs. Everett, and Georgy had said to herself, as she had seen her asleep, it was the last time she would ever look at her. Before she was gone, however, Constance came running to her room.

"Georgy, you are not going, surely! What is the matter? Why did you never come and see me this morning?"

"Yes, I am going directly."


"Why, are you afraid of Mr. Sandon's appearing to fetch you? indeed, my dear Georgy, you must manage to stay."

"No, I can't."

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing; I cannot stay here always, and so I am going;" she looked musingly at Constance.

"But, dear, why won't you tell me what has happened? Come and stay with me, if you want a



place of refuge, I should be so glad to have you: now you should settle that at once;" and in her genial good-nature, she would have taken any trouble, and set off immediately to Grainthorpe, if she could have been of any use to Georgy.

"No, that cannot be; thank you all the same, dear Mrs. Everett. Good-bye!—I am going downstairs now."

Constance came to the head of the stairs, and leant over the bannisters in her white dressing-gown. Georgy still looked at her, and thought vacantly how marvellously graceful she was; and Constance, who did not know her thoughts, fancied that something had happened, as she met the other's intent look.

So they separated, and Constance went back puzzled at her behaviour; wondering what her sudden departure meant, and why she did not explain it.


Miss Sparrow received her niece most kindly. Georgy said that her uncle was still angry, that she could not stay too long at Millthorpe Grange, and so had come again to ask hospitality from her aunt.

The kind old woman assented to all, and only said, that "it was fortunate she was at home; Georgy never writing when she visited her friends, but always appearing suddenly." She said no more,

and never questioned her as to *what* had induced her sudden return. Georgy fancied that this was only because she took no especial notice of the circumstance; but the aunt was not so devoid of perception. Her niece never mentioned the Erskines now, and she had seemed so happy in their society but a little time ago: they were surely connected in some way with this sudden change.

She was right; but, kindly and prudently, did not say so. She did all that was in her power to make Georgy happy; and perhaps the only good which she could do was to leave her unquestioned.

A still gray life they both led. The aunt in her quiet, uniform course of tending all those around her; being friends with, not patronizing, poor people; befriending her relatives, and working hard for all whom she could help. Georgy required nothing; she passed her days in a forced round of mechanical occupation; she dreaded being unoccupied for a moment, for then tears would start into her eyes: never a burst of tears, only a few that seemed wrung forth by a burning pain, and brought her no relief. Her love was a bitter reality, which she would have put from her; but she could not. There were days when one idea pressed so heavily upon her, that not for one moment was she without the consciousness of it; she tried to thrust it from her, but the strength failed her.



Those long days that could not be told of, only felt, with their silent relentless suffering that never changed! Sometimes she took eager, hasty walks; but to approach any place where she had been with *them*, made her turn back. Through the day she would talk in a quick, excited way; and then in the evening she sat opposite to her aunt, and assisted in finishing a large crochet-quilt which she was making. There she sat, with a worn, fixedly-sad look upon a face that should have looked young, and yet seemed older than the peaceful, wrinkled one beside her.


At night she would watch for hours at the window, looking not into the streets, but towards the back of the houses which formed the next street: she watched the lights as they changed from room to room, and glimmered distinctly up the staircase, as the inmates went one by one to rest. It was far the strongest interest which she had; every night she resumed her occupation, feeling a certain degree of acquaintanceship with the people, the houses, and the lights: they mitigated her sense of loneliness. Here, where she was so near his home, and so far separated from him, she knew not but that even some of these people might be nearer to him than herself. Sometimes she recalled with a sort of stupid tenacity a thousand little events of her childhood; trifles which she had forgotten came back very clearly to her, and she invested them all with that sort of unreal bright-

ness which those who are unhappy give to their past, whether it has deserved it or not.

Those long summer nights, which she never afterwards could forget, but knew one thing that they and their misery were lived out and would return no more: she never forgot her one idea, even in her sleep. Through the sultry August days she had no wish for the green fields and waving trees that she had always seen in the summer time: she was glad to be away from all that; it would have made the longing more painful, and the fever stronger. The time was past when her love had been its own support, and she had lived through the strength of that meat. Now, when she looked forward, it seemed as if she understood nothing but what a breaking heart must be.

There was an end to this, however; for, though she did not know it, such a state could not last. She fell sick, and lay for a while, hating even the daylight—ill of misery; after that, she became quiet in comparison.

The old woman's life slid calmly on by the side of Georgy's; and there was a power in that simple, holy life, and unconscious goodness, which could soothe and quiet others. How quietly their time passed on in that great, struggling city; so near the tumult, yet so far separated from it!—One had never heeded it, and the other was too dead and



dull at heart. There was little change till Miss Sparrow fell ill; then the two were drawn nearer together, for Georgy nursed her.

It was difficult to say if Georgy grieved for her aunt: she was engrossed by the selfishness of her one idea, and on that all the virtue that was in her was spent. She did not feel for anything or any one there, but through the thought of another life and another death, in which she should never bear a part. All her feelings were vicarious, and nothing touched her but through the medium of that one idea. Then again she became remorseful for her insensibility.

When her aunt recovered, they resumed their former existence. Sometimes now Georgy talked out her thoughts, and once her aunt led her on to talk of James Erskine.

"He is very clever—is he not? I have often heard of him from his mother," was all the art of her beginning.

"Yes," said Georgy, abruptly; and then talked on by degrees, in the incoherent yet guarded way in which people sometimes talk of those they love. They will criticise, and then presently contradict themselves. They would not endure a hard word concerning their idol from another, although they will blame it sometimes themselves, and prolong the pleasure of talking by the most wilful stratagems.


"It is very long since I was young, but Georgy I was in love once, though it seems ridiculous now to tell you of it."

"Why, aunt?"

"You are like the rest of the world, dear, and you will look back upon yourself with wonder some day. I do not mean to say that married people are not happier: not that I wish my fate to have been different: I have been very happy, but still any one I love I should wish to see married; and you will be some day, I hope. One has no children, else. It is very foolish; children bring trouble, too—but nobody who is in love can help wishing for children, I suppose"—she added, simply; and her thoughts went back from Georgy to her niece's children, and thence travelled to her own youth.

"But I have had a great deal in this world, and there will be heaven some day, soon perhaps," she said, softly.

Heaven! that *was* heaven to her, whilst to the other it meant nothing more than the grave. Was it not a land where there was neither marrying nor giving in marriage? and therefore it had no meaning to Georgy.

They often talked together now, and Georgy knew that her aunt knew whom she had loved; yet she never abandoned the form of talking of James Erskine as of an utterly indifferent person. 

it was not always interesting to the aunt to hear that one often-recurring subject of conversation; and the last evening that they ever sat down-stairs together, the aunt still remained listening to Georgy while she longed to be away, to say her prayers and sleep, or try to sleep. The next day she fell ill, and insisted upon sending for her nephew, Mr. Sandon. Georgy wished at first to dissuade her.

"No," she answered, "my time is short; and Georgy, you must be reconciled to him before I die."

Very soon Georgy and the servants knew that she was dying. "Tell me all your real history, and what was James Erskine to you?" she said, and her niece told her.

It had been a melancholy day for Stephen Anstruther, that on which he had arrived at Grainthorpe. Georgy's letter of refusal had not reached him, and when he wrote to announce his arrival in England, it was clear to Mr. Sandon that he knew nothing of the change which had taken place.

Two days afterwards, Poppy ran up-stairs to say that Captain Anstruther had arrived, and Aunt Jane hurried down from the nursery: on her way, however, first making an excursion to see if Stephen's room was prepared, and then a sharp diversion on to the kitchen to see about dinner.

Georgy was in London with Miss Sparrow,"

said Mr. Sandon. Stephen was surprised, but Mr. Sandon went on to talk of the suddenness of his arrival and Miss Sparrow's last attack, whilst he was preparing to break the real cause of Georgy's non-appearance.

Aunt Jane was secretly wishing that Stephen might be made duly alive to Georgy's wickedness. The children were all gone except Poppy, who, sitting on a low stool, with a picture-book upon her knee, was eagerly listening to every word which fell from the lips of her elders.

"Where is your sister now?" asked Mr. Sandon of Stephen.


"She has a pretty house in the New Forest. Georgy would like that country very much. I will take her there soon, if I can."

"Georgy is not going with you," said a grave, distinct voice; "because she says she won't marry you, because she won't; and because papa says he's sure she likes somebody else, and he is very angry about it."

Except the mother, who gasped out, "Poppy!" nobody spoke.

Then Mrs. Sandon took away the unfortunate Poppy, and the other two remained together.

"Confound that child, she is always in the way! her mother never remembers that she is in the room, and talks of everything before her. I must have



told you, Stephen, so I may as well begin now: you have not received either Georgy's last letter or mine, I fear. Nearly five months ago, she told me, without assigning any reason for her change, that she would not marry you."

"She has forgotten me; is that what you mean?"

"I do not exactly know that; girls *are* changeable."

"I should not have thought that Georgy was," Stephen answered, stoutly. "And so you think that she has forgotten me? It was not your fault, Robert; I am sure you would have done all you could to prevent it. It was a foolish thing in me to go away for three years. I have thought so sometimes since." Stephen blamed no one, but his look and tone bespoke his disappointment, poor fellow! "Three years, three years," he muttered to himself.

Mr. Sandon went on to recount Georgy's departure, or rather flight, her eccentric return to Millthorpe Grange, and that now she had left Mrs. Erskine's protection and was living with her aunt.

"No one was unkind to her?" asked Stephen, more sharply than he usually spoke.


"I have had enough to bear from her without being asked that," was the answer.

"I am not blaming you, for I know nothing about it; but you cannot look upon it all in the same light that I do, Robert. I should like to see Georgy myself, indeed I should."

Stephen did not wish to leave Grainthorpe immediately. For three years he had looked forward to his return, and to his marriage; and now that the whole prospect had vanished, and nothing had as yet taken its place, poor Stephen felt a perfect castaway.

He played with the children, who three years ago had ruled him, and who now quickly resumed the practice. He obtained Poppy's forgiveness next morning; he found her crying up-stairs in the schoolroom, because she was too wicked to come down. He evaded orders by taking her into the garden, and would not return to the drawing-room till she was allowed to do so. Stephen's opinion of Aunt Jane's unkindness to Georgy was rather increased by Poppy's revelations and remarks. Poppy and her playfellow were constantly going into the garden; which place of resort always drew on a conversation about Georgy.

He soon received another letter from her, which he answered, acquiescing in her decision, but saying that he wished to meet her again, and have at least one farewell conversation with her.




CHAPTER XXI.

MISS SPARROW's summons was immediately answered, not only by Mr. Sandon, but by Stephen. Georgy had not expected the latter, and it seemed to her as if three years had been put back when she heard his voice. When she entered the room, a stout, florid, but originally fair-complexioned man was standing by her uncle.

"Georgy," he said, warmly and cheerily, as if it were a matter of course to meet her again; "it is a long while since I have seen you: how pale you are looking!—nursing your poor aunt does not agree with you."

This cordiality was very acceptable just then, and she felt grateful to him for it. It seemed so natural to see him again. Perhaps those other people whom she had known since his departure, were all an uneasy dream; and altogether she disliked the meeting less than she had expected.

One day more, and the time from which nature shrinks had come: their aunt was dying; and Mr. Sandon had not arrived too early. The old woman



fell into a heavy slumber, and the three watched through the night by her bedside: before morning that sleep was death.

Last words and deathbed scenes occur oftener in books than in reality.


Last words are oftener the mutterings of some perhaps trivial dream—the request for some comfort, or some change of pillows; the grateful recognition of some loved one—than phrases which contain the full expression of the life-thought, or maxims which shall be the guidance of those who remain behind. Our lives, not our deathbeds, most furnish these.

Georgy was terribly alone: there was no one now to call her “child” any more. The last link between herself and her youth seemed gone in that kind old woman, whose goodness she had at first so little valued. Mr. Sandon, when away from the influence of his wife, soon became more placable, and readily forgave Georgy; who could not refuse, in the first warmth of the reconciliation, to return to Grainthorpe with her uncle.

“Then you will not marry Stephen?” said Uncle Robert, sadly.

“No, I cannot.”

“Well, I will tell you what you have brought upon him,” and he put on the hopeless air which a man assumes when called upon to explain what he is perfectly aware will never be understood.



"You know how much your great aunt has left you?"

"Yes: ten thousand pounds."

"Well, *you* are safe from all the chances of fortune; but Stephen, who entered into partnership with me, has of course suffered along with me: I was against it at the time, but he would not be gainsaid. He considered himself one with you, and embarked his money with the little which your poor father left you: that is 'all gone'; and his, and mine, have both suffered."

"A great deal?"

"Yes, a great deal. I am poorer now than I was twenty years ago, and Stephen has not, besides his pay, fifty pounds a-year;" and he looked at the empty fireplace, while his thoughts wandered from Georgy and her misdeeds, to the harsh realities of the coal-trade. Such things, too, can bring sorrow and sleepless nights, as well as love; which people in love do not always remember.

"But I don't want my money; indeed, I don't. It is hard to think that Stephen should have lost almost everything for me: cannot my money go, and his be saved?"

"Don't talk nonsense and be romantic. What are you to Stephen now? Do you think he could take money from you? Had you been his wife, then all would have been different; but now ——"

"I never thought of this, too," she said, sadly.
"Is there no other way?"

"But to marry," burst out Mr. Sandon, who was divided between a desire that the marriage should take place and some dislike to match-making, in spite of his previous anger against Georgy.

Stephen lingered on in town with the uncle and his niece until the funeral and all the business which it involved was over, and then Mr. Sandon arranged that he should return with them to Grainthorpe.


Once again Georgy was obliged to go to Mrs. Erskine's house to bid her good-bye. James was not there, she knew, and Mrs. Erskine had just returned from Edinburgh. She was in her room with a pile of beautiful lace before her.

"Georgy dear, I am glad to see you again, and very glad that you have made it up with your uncle: I have not quite forgiven you for leaving Millthorpe Grange in such an unmannerly way. Are you *quite* sure that there was nobody you wanted to see in London?"

Georgy did not laugh much at this simple jest.
"Have you heard my news; the only news I have, or ever shall have again?"

"Tell me," said Georgy. She ought to know it, if any one did.

"James is going to marry pretty Constance Everett: she is a winning creature, my future



daughter-in-law. I have sometimes fancied that this might be, and you see I was right."

"She is the most charming woman I have ever seen."

"Yes, very charming: you are right. She quite fascinates me, sometimes, old woman as I am.—Yet I suppose that I wish James some impossibility of a paragon: I wish"—and she crumpled up the lace in the intensity of her feelings, whilst the wish was still unexpressed. "Look, this is for Constance. I have hoarded it for a long time. I would not give it all to the girls. James has a weakness for lace, and will like to see it on his wife. I got it in Belgium when I was travelling with my husband; wearing it always bothered me: but Constance is made for pretty things."

"It is lovely. I know that you must have lived in great dread of tearing it."

"I never knew a happy evening when I wore it: how people can enjoy themselves in point lace, I do not understand—my flounces were never out of my head."

"Well, Mrs. Everett will have them now."

"Mrs. Everett, Mrs. Everett! my head is full of her just now. It is strange that it should have fallen out just as I foreboded. I know that I ought to be very glad: everybody tells me so. and everybody must be right; but, Georgy, I would not be captious,

but I wonder sometimes how much she can love? I sometimes ask myself that."

"More than you think, perhaps: she has had no great scope for that as yet," answered Georgy, in a constrained voice.

"I will not doubt about it," said Mrs. Erskine, still engrossed by her one subject; and when she was engrossed, she always must give utterance to her preoccupation. "I will have no doubts; his father and I were very happy, and may they be the same: a loveless marriage is a fearful thing," and the tears stood in her eyes as she remembered her own early experience.

"Mr. Erskine and his betrothed are very fond of each other, so you must keep these reflections till they are more needed," said Georgy, with a forced smile.

Why is it always so? Why had these two the greater power to love, and the other woman the greater power to win love? Things are often thus at cross purposes here.

And, oh! why did not the older woman know how her requirements *had* once been fulfilled, and that one yet more foolish than herself had given her child love enough even to satisfy *her*?

"I must go now, dear Mrs. Erskine," said Georgy, when they had talked a little more.

"Good bye, dear: oh, Georgy, those were pleasant

days you spent with us in July!—James and I shall never keep house alone together again—I little thought how soon all that would end.”

“Yes, it was pleasant.”

“He was always so fond of you, my dear. I wish—I have often thought that if you two children had had a little more money each of you, you might have done very well together.”

Must she say that? But what mattered those words when all was over? Ask any one who has been greeted with the indifferent smiling supposition that the accomplishment of their dearest wishes was a pleasant possibility; is it not gall and wormwood offered again to the taste, and when the worst seemed past?

There was something very open about Mrs. Erskine’s maternal selfishness, even in her air-castle—she considered Georgy merely as a convenient appendage for James.

“I am a foolish old woman, and I cannot expect you to sit listening to my maundering talk. Poor James!—but you always liked him, I know:—who could help it?”

“Yes, you know quite well that I never could forget either him or you;” and Georgy smiled again at the mother’s patent idolatry.

She bid an abrupt farewell to Mrs. Erskine, who thought her cold, and fancied that after all the care

and kindness that the young girl had received she might have expressed herself a little more warmly, and not seemed so indifferent now that there was no further need of her protection. But Georgy appeared impassible; so they parted: and the mother did not know who had loved her son best.

CHAPTER XXII.

GEORGY resumed her former life at Grainthorpe, which was different in some respects from what it had been. She had grown older by a great deal in a few months' absence; and, without any effort on her part, her uncle and aunt seemed to acknowledge it. She was not afraid of Aunt Jane, who had become far more affable towards her. Uncle Robert was very kind now; perhaps because she knew better how to manage him.

She had some idea of going away to live by herself. Mr. Sandon said, that "Surely she would not think of such a thing: she was too young, and it could not be."


He was paternal; and to Georgy, who was of an obedient nature, her plan became an impossibility, when soberly and kindly asked to give it up. She was too young, and it was altogether a perfectly romantic idea. What would the Macbeans have said if they had known that such a thing had ever been mentioned? We must not offend the world.

So the time passed on, and Stephen remained at

Grainthorpe, and Georgy's life began again to be a repetition of her former one. She sat at the window, watching the sea and the sand-hills, until the image of both seemed stereotyped upon her brain, and she hated both. It was no doubt well for her that she could not indulge her solitary propensities, and did not live alone, unconstrained by any of those vulgar necessities of getting ready for dinner, answering questions, and the like. The time seemed very long, and she often thought with dismay, "that all through life she should be obliged every day to answer people." She regarded the faculty of speech in no other light than as entailing the necessity of communication with those who were indifferent to her.

Now that she returned fully to every grinding little repetition of Grainthorpe life, it seemed that she learnt afresh what suffering was; surely she knew it to the end: no fresh page could ever be turned for her. That is thought at every new phase of pain, and still there will sometimes come another. Who knows? perhaps half her misery was from loneliness. Amongst all the inequalities of human circumstances, that of the comparative loneliness of some is not one of the smallest.

Her love was past; she had forgotten it, perhaps. There are some, who, when they have loved, and it is over, will talk of it: then a past feeling becomes an amusement. Some do not act so; and surely it



is better not. Bury your love and look at it no more--bury it, and tread down the earth upon it. But *you* should do it: let no one else smile at what has been your life. Trample on it yourself, for you have worshipped it, and whisper the renunciation of what you have glorified. But let no one else come near that grave, for your flesh and blood is buried there too. You will need no memorial to remember it; and you will be happy, if sometimes the past does not return unbidden, and force you to look upon the face of your dead again. So love was gone!—No, not that: if it cannot remain long after we are what they call “in love,”—long after we have forgotten that—it is a small, pitiful thing. We are in love for a day, but may love on into eternity.


After some time, that happened which prosaic people may have predicted from the beginning, and said was the best thing; others have declared monstrous and impossible. Georgy married Stephen Anstruther. He loved her fondly and faithfully. She had judged him harshly once, disregarding his affection; and because she had no sympathy with him, she imputed that want to him as a failing. He was impoverished through his desire to benefit her, and now she had the satisfaction of knowing that she could compensate him for that. His love won the day, for she had no one else to love her, and in time she married him. Do not ask why? Such

marriages are not impossible—not uncommon, perhaps. The reasons which produce them are more difficult to describe than any one positive feeling of like or dislike. But life is made up of occurrences springing from such complex causes.

As Georgy left Grainthorpe, she smiled to herself, perhaps at the thought how, long ago, when almost a child, she had engaged herself to Stephen, that she might get away: and now things had come round almost to the same point where they were before; and she married the man whom it had once appeared to her impossible to marry. Only her view of all things was changed, and to leave Grainthorpe was no longer positive happiness.

They lived not far from Grainthorpe. Stephen, still being engaged in Mr. Sandon's affairs, preferred it.

Georgy made no opposition to him in anything and had the satisfaction of knowing that her money had saved him from the poverty to which, for her sake, he would otherwise have been condemned. He gardened and farmed: he did not gain much by that last occupation. Georgy gardened too, and listened to her husband's theories upon agriculture, education, and many other subjects. If the test of a woman's domestic happiness be her disinclination for general society, surely Georgy's was complete; for society she never sought. Her acquaintance



gave different accounts of her: some ladies said, that she was a sweet, amiable, and affectionate creature; but one impulsive young friend of mine declared that she was the coldest woman imaginable. Both were in their ways right; to me she exactly deserved the German's definition—"Aimable plutôt qu'aimante," for she was the coldest of all the gentle people I have ever known.

She gardened, talked, and visited with the same real indifference. "Mrs. Anstruther does not go out much; she is not very strong, or equal to much exertion," was said of her.

Her not being strong, if she ever propagated that idea amongst her friends, was a little piece of hypocrisy; she disliked going out, but I believe was quite up to it if she pleased. To her husband only did she ever warm; and towards him she often showed a restless solicitude, which appeared as if she was striving to make up for some neglect that he had incurred. Stephen was always happy, and thought his wife was the most perfect and best regulated of women; he read to her in the evenings, and then when he was asleep, or theorizing, she played; and though he did not care much for music, the noise did not disturb him: he was rather soothed by it than otherwise.


Of her former friends she saw but little; she seldom went to Millthorpe Grange. Once when

there, she was startled by names now perfectly unfamiliar to her lips. An old friend of James Erskine's was there, and by a natural chance the whole party talked over Mr. Erskine. It was nearly two years since she had either spoken his name, or heard it spoken. Mrs. Anstruther looked up, but there was not the slightest change visible in her face: she did not colour, as she would once have done, and did not shrink from the conversation; though she never actually joined in it, until forced to do so by a question from the person opposite to her. A very close observer would have seen that she steadied her countenance before she answered, and looked carelessly into the face, but not the eyes, of the speaker.

"Yes, I knew him very well; but it is some time now since I have seen him: he is very agreeable: a very pleasant fellow;" and her thoughts reverted to Mrs. Lumsden.

She had tried so hard to say those last words just as Mrs. Lumsden would have done: had she succeeded? she wondered.

There was no need to wonder: we all trouble ourselves needlessly about the remarks which we must excite. She felt guilty when the words were said; her courage was gone, and she longed to hide herself: somebody was looking at her, she fancied.



But no one remarked her ; no one thought of her ; and the conversation continued, and she took part in it again : always about him ; and then they mentioned Constance.

She heard them as the dead would, if they could some day hear the living talk of this world and its ties, standing thoughtlessly upon their graves.

At last it was over, and she did not draw near the man who had praised James Erskine ; did not try to make friends with him, or court him with the trembling, anxious solicitude with which the friends of those we love are often treated ; for she loved nothing now. She moved away, and sat talking to some young ladies, listening in an affectionate, pleasant way, to a good deal of very new and original matter, respecting their views of life. She was popular with most women ; men generally passed her over and forgot her. This was partly her own fault ; she cared so much less than most of her sex for men's approbation, that, with a visible equity which does not always run through this world's course of events, she did not receive it.

This visit to the Grange was not repeated : she never went again to the house where they had talked of James Erskine.

As I remember Mrs. Anstruther last, with a tired

expression on her face, as if she were tired with life, not merely of the passing events of the day,

"In truth,
She seem'd one dying in a mask of youth."

She walked through a little plantation of firs and birches which adjoined her garden and was sheltered by hills from the sea, and then down to the sandy bay, strewn with large gray stones, with here and there clear pools which the tide had left.

"It is very pleasant here," was all her answer to a question which did not allude to the scenery.

"You will come and see me in London?"

"No," she said, shortly, with a quick genuine look of dislike; "no, thank you."

"Why not?"

"I will come some day, if you will let me, but not now; I do not like it:" and she looked grave.

"You are very fond of this place, are you not?"

"Yes, I like it; I am very happy here: I was not fond of Grainthorpe; but I never wish to leave this place:" and her manner put an end to all further questions. She left me and walked on to the fishermen's village near, where she knew all the people, and they all knew her. They said that "she was a fine talker, and had a deal of conversation, the mistress had."

Three years after quiet, dull Mrs. Anstruther's marriage, her friends congratulated her on

prospect of soon having a child to care for, and to brighten up her home.

That time came, but a week afterwards she and her baby were both buried; and in the house there was all the usual suppressed bustle, and the real grief, too, that should belong to a funeral.

She was dead, and that wasted life was at an end.

She had been twice mistaken, first in her infatuated love, and then in her marriage. Many more years must have passed before any one could sufficiently have recovered to have entered upon such an union, and she perhaps never could. If she was happier during the still years of her marriage than during those which had preceded it, it was not so much from the passive gratitude and affection which she gave her husband, as from a rest which she found inwardly, in the consolations of religion, and in the development of what talent she possessed. Her love of music grew to be a second religion to her, or rather became inseparably united with her real one. It was a better, truer expression than any written speech could be, and she envied none the power of words. It was of and to the past that she still played. If all things were known, would it not be strange to read the true dedication of many a poem, song, and picture. Pitiable, perhaps, if none but those who

can work out their thoughts suffered; if to speak so were not of itself the greatest pleasure life can give, when the hope of positive satisfaction is abandoned.

Hers had been an exceptional nature, and the circumstances in which she had been placed somewhat exceptional from their great loneliness. All the feelings, which had never known father, mother, brother, or sister, to pour themselves upon, had been centred in one person, and he had failed her.

Passion could not last for ever; that was past and gone long ago. It was an inner dream, that recollection of her girlhood: a feeling entirely apart from her actual life. We all love beauty, and the only time it had ever practically approached her was then: she had not forgotten, but there was no sharp grief in the recollection. She did not love any one much, perhaps; for she had given all she had once, and now it was not in her power to give it again.

She had not many dispositions to make concerning her worldly goods; only of some valuable ornaments of her mother's, she had said—

“My baby will never want them now, you shall give them to Constance Everett.”

“To whom?” they asked.

“To—to—James Erskine's wife;” and so they gave them.

When the funeral was over, and that last distri-

bution of things which always goes on began, Aunt Jane asked the simple nurse what she would like as a remembrance of her mistress.

"She would like a book," she said; "the mistress was aye a great reader, and I'm keen after books myself: I'd like just one of hers, poor body."

Nurse's literary attainments were not great, and Aunt Jane judged it best to give her a Bible. She disapproved on principle of the lower classes reading, but made an orthodox exception in favour of the Bible. It was not the one which Georgy generally used, but a purple book, that Aunt Jane did not much examine. The nurse valued it exceedingly, and was generally unwilling that it should be too much read "for fear it should take harm." There was writing in the beginning, "not the mistress's name, but some one's that's dead likely, too, for she prized that book always; and it's a good remembrance of her, poor woman: she was a good body."


Yes: all that that book was connected with, was dead, past, and gone.

She had expressed a wish to be buried not near her home, but in the London church where her old aunt lay. Her husband religiously followed out that desire, and it was done. She had often yearned in thought after that resting-place. There, where her young fancy had attired all things in such gorgeous colours; there, where she had loved all, and embraced

all in imagination ; so near to where her little happiness had been lived through ; and where, amongst many passing footsteps, his must surely fall. Her thought was realized. They had been so utterly separated, that he never knew who was buried in that church he passed so often : so near to where Constance was playing with his children, happy in his home. He never knew where she lay. Did he still remember her ?

After a due time given to grief, Stephen chose another wife ; a rosy, good-humoured person, with a rather jealous disposition. She believed Stephen to be the first of men ; and because of that perhaps, and because of the natural perversity of human nature, it was long before he believed her to be Georgy's equal. When, in time, his house was gradually filling with children, and her jealousy had developed itself, he reflected that it was perhaps well for Georgy's child that she had gone with her mother.

Once in Mr. Erskine's house, long after his marriage, a fair-haired little girl came running to her father to beg to go out with him, and to show what her mother had just brought out of her treasure-box and given her. It was a heart and cross of massed turquoise, and as he bent down to see "the beautiful thing," a vision came quickly across him of the room where he had given it, and of a wistful,



loving face which looked up at him. It was a sad recollection, and he took the child's hand, and pressed her close to him to dispel it. He was not much changed in appearance; only he smiled seldomer, and his manner was sometimes rather sarcastic, which formerly it never was. He *had* remembered her: Many a time he had thought of her as she was that night, and oftener still as he had seen her upon that morning when he had seen her for the last time, and she had turned quietly away; and her low tone, "Yes, James," came back to him: he had never heard her voice again, but he remembered it well.

Those who knew him said that he had grown older in heart, of late years. He was a tender father, and already was looking forward in thought to what his children might be to him. It was early, perhaps, for a man still young to be looking forward so directly to his children.

"Here's mamma," said the child, as a quick, clear voice called out, "Childy, are you ready?"

It was James Erskine's wife. She was still unchanged: time and the world had not fretted her, and as the bright winning lady came lightly into the room, a sunshiny presence filled it.

"Constance, where has this come from? Don't give it to Consy."

"Why? Does a tale hang thereby?" she said,

laughing: "it was amongst the things Mrs Anstruther left me so strangely."

"Mrs. Anstruther!" he repeated to himself.

"Do you remember it?"

"Yes; I gave it to her."

"Ah! James,—poor Mrs. Anstruther! I often thought how it would have interested me to have met her again. Poor Georgy! it is not good to have such a nature," she said, drawing back as if the exchange was offered to her, and looking musingly into the distance. "It may do in books, or for a great artist, but for hard practice ——"

"I daresay she was very happy," he said, quickly; "how you do run on!"

"No, she was not: I read her when I first saw her, and I know what a cold, strange woman those who saw her afterwards thought her: and it was your doing," she laughed. "And so *you* gave her that: was it on the day when you picked me up at the station?"

"Yes," he answered, laying his hand on her shoulder, and looking at her lovingly: she noticed neither the touch nor the look just then.

"Are you coming?"

"No, I cannot."

"To-night, then?"

"No," and he wanted to take the cross.

"Now, do let Consy have it; her heart is set

upon it, unless yours is specially too: and think over your own misdeeds, James, instead of ever looking at mine."

Constance and her child went laughing off together, and her husband heard her beautiful voice singing snatches of a song, as she went down the staircase. He still kept the trinket, and his eye fell mechanically upon the church, where the woman who had loved him best was buried. Forgive her! you who are wiser and stronger: if she had loved him too much, she had suffered yet more before she found her rest.

He had grown great now—*she* had never from the moment when she had first seen him, doubted that he was to be so. Was he not great already, if the world could only see it? And she had crowned him with that halo of glory which a woman throws around the man whom she reverences. He shall rise; but she ignores all the recognised means by which he must make his way amongst his fellows, and immediately dreams for him a crown. Her certainty was to be realised: only she who had known it was not there to watch the man of genius.


There is a wondrous equality here, if we did but know it. *He* had gained his desire, and *she* had lost hers—and there was no great difference between them now. The sternest irony of fate may lie in the fulfilment of our wishes. As he stood there, worn and tired to the heart's core, his noble head

bent down, and his eyes fixed upon the building, which he did not see, a stranger might have said, that, if any man could have afforded a justification for the great passion with which he had been worshipped, James Erskine did: and it is seldom that we can look coldly upon another and see there the excuse for such idolatry.

We are all revenged some day; and she, if she had ever wished for revenge, had found hers now.

THE END.

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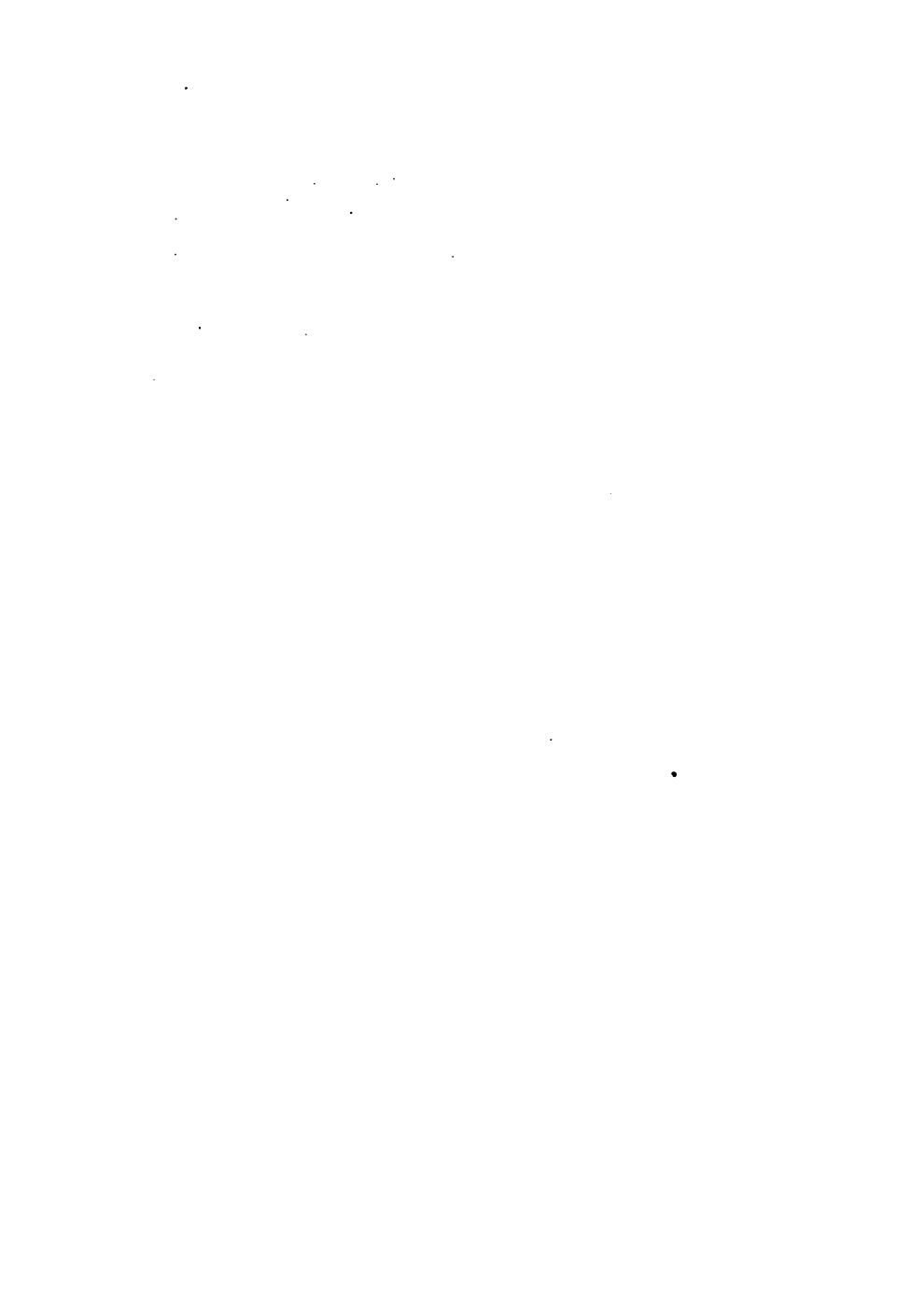
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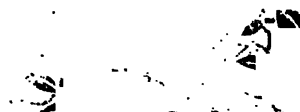
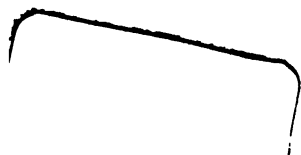
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